

Enjoy the World!

A woman remembers traveling alone

Lenora Ucko



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1. Introduction –

It was scary – to travel alone. I always saw myself as attached to other people - the daughter, the sister, the wife, the mother, the teacher, the friend. And then I was alone.

Recently divorced, with grown children, an aging parent, friends off doing their own thing, and a two-week winter vacation looming ahead. For the first time in my life, there was no one to go with. Did that seem like a catastrophe? Yes! A challenge? Of course. What to do?

Could I throw caution to the winds (more or less) and plan a trip by myself? Not really. Could I plan one that had caution built into it? Perhaps!

I decided to visit my elderly mother in Florida, then rent a car, and travel down to the Florida Keys. After all, I was not leaving the country and if it turned out to be uncomfortable, I could just turn around, return the car, and do something else.

Somehow, I told no one where I was going, how long I would be away, and how I could be reached. I would rely on my ability to check in if I wanted to.

It was just as well because when I started to drive, I decided not to go directly to the Keys, but to head first to Flamingo, the southernmost city on the Florida mainland. I do not know why, but it felt good to change plans in midstream without asking anyone. There was something to be said for traveling alone.

In good spirits, I began to drive from the city of Homestead down the long road south to Flamingo. All was well until I

saw signs saying, "Last Gas until Flamingo." Just how far was that? Foolishly, I did not know.

The countryside became more and more desolate. Scattered houses. Bare stretches of land. Rarely another car on the road. No stores or gas stations. And certainly no public phones. Cell phones, ipads, and GPS were all far in the future.

What if I got a flat tire? What if I felt sick? What if I needed a bathroom?

I tried not to panic. In the future, I'd have to be a better planner. Now I concentrated on the road and tried to appreciate the scenic Everglades that showed up.

It seemed to take forever, but I finally arrived at Flamingo, safe and sound and sobered by the experience.

I spent three days in Flamingo - getting to know myself! The first morning, I awoke, looked at the clock, and saw it was already 8:30 am. Ready to bound out of bed to start the day, suddenly I stopped. Why? In the past I had often wanted to lounge around before breakfast, but didn't. Why not now? It felt almost immoral. But I lounged and lounged and did not eat breakfast until 11 am! It was nice.

Flamingo was an eye-opening experience. I did as I wanted, without explaining, without guilt, without others to prop me up. And it was beautiful. The sea all around, lots of sunshine, excursions through the Everglades, pleasant conversations with other tourists, and learning who I was and how to be on my own.

My trip to Flamingo opened the door for me. I learned to be cautious and sensible and yet to enjoy great benefits – of traveling alone.

I wish you the same.

Lenora Ucko

Note:

To help plan a trip alone, see travel tips at

<http://www.smartertravel.com/travel-advice/ten-tips-for-women-traveling-alone.html?id=1268589>

2. Let's Meet at the Key West Sunset

Driving down the Florida Keys to Key West, I stopped for a late afternoon beach walk and saw an unusual sight - the sunset. As a "big city" dweller, I have little first-hand knowledge of the sun's comings and goings. There are four possibilities in a city: day or night and sunny or cloudy. But here all was different.

The sun was dropping into Florida Bay in an array of rose, gold, violet and gray; and the low cloud bank, hugging the western horizon opened a small door in welcome. But then, reflected on or by the cloud formation, the sun suddenly appeared as a double image, one sun under the other, and both continued the descent in tandem. It was an "hourglass" sunset. Phenomenal .

Then I noticed a man with his tripod and Nikon, all facing west. "Did you get that shot?" I asked by way of introduction. "No. The camera still needs some adjustment. Did you like the view?" "Spectacular," I said coining a description.

The preliminaries over, we got down to the serious business of discussing our hobbies . Mine was traveling; Charlie's (that was his name) was watching sunsets. We both it turned out were headed for Key West, and as I was leaving to continue my trip, Charlie called after me, "Let's meet at the Key West sunset!"

Just what did he mean by that I wondered, but did not ask.

Key West is the southernmost tip of the United States (except for Hawaii). It contains a population of about 30,000 southernmost Americans, as well as similarly located motels

and restaurants . Duval Street is probably the southernmost shopping area of the country. It is a straight east-west street about four miles in length. My room was at a motel at the eastern end of the street, near the southernmost beach.

Making my way through Duval Street the next afternoon, I stopped to ask some Key West “Conchs” (pronounced “conks” and the popular name of both a well-known seashell and the residents of this city) where to find the bar made famous by Ernest Hemingway. Then with some hesitation, I asked whether there was someplace from which to watch the sunset. The answer was prompt and sure.

“Oh, you mean the boardwalk at Mallory Square! We’re going to watch tonight also. Come along.”

Well, if the place is that well known, perhaps I would see Charlie at the sunset after all.

We all proceeded to the western end of Duval Street, and making a sharp left turn just before the famous Pier House Motel , we came upon Mallory Square.

Mallory Square is not really a square , but an entrance to a large parking lot bounded by low buildings on one side and the boardwalk on the other. At this time, about five p.m., the lot was jammed with cars, vans, motorcycles, anything on wheels that brought natives and tourists alike to watch the sunset. Not a square inch of ground was visible, so packed were the parked vehicles.

We made our way up on the boardwalk, which is really not a boardwalk. It is a cement sidewalk or pavement stretching about one long city block overlooking the water, the sky, the

birds, the little islands and the boats. The boardwalk was even more filled with people than the parking lot with cars. Some people ride, but many people walk to Mallory Square.

People of all descriptions were there. Many were residents, some native to the area, others transplanted from the north. Then there were the tourists: retired older people on holiday; adults taking a winter vacation; college students between semesters. Children of all ages were moving about, negotiating better standing room for unobstructed viewing. Toddlers were perched on their fathers' heads or held in a mother's arms. People from the Caribbean Islands were speaking their native French or Spanish or British English. Also heard was the unique speech of French Canadians, Midwesterners, South Africans, and the ever present New Yorkers. Colors, sizes, shapes - all were represented at Mallory Square. A few hundred people, having little in common, stood in each other's way viewing with eagerness the unfolding scene.

"Those flat little black boats with the crossed posts sticking up? They are the shrimp boats returning with the day's catch," a father informs his Chicago child.

The child ponders the size of the boats for a moment, and then murmurs, "No wonder the fish are called shrimp."

The sun was now sending out ribbons of pink and gray through the open work of clouds in its neighborhood.

"Were you here yesterday to see the double image of the sun?" one habitué asked another.

"I was late, but caught the last few minutes," came the reply.

The sun approached the horizon and the colors became more intense. Pink turned to rose; gold to orange; lavender to purple. An accompanying change of mood affected the viewers. Conversation slowed to silence. One tourist whispered to another, "See that little island over to the right? It's owned by a wealthy..."

"Ssh!" interrupted the other. Information was distracting now. Talking interfered with the sun going down.

In a crescendo of light and color, the flaming globe went into the water. And the viewers became very still. The distinctions of age, size, background, wealth faded. No longer separate individuals, the group was united by a joint hushed appraisal of the disappearing life source.

The same thought went through every head. "The sun is gone." For many, the sudden sadness of the moment was unexpected. The emptiness of the sky was reflected in every eye and heart. We shifted about uneasily.

Then one Key West "conch" said to his neighbor, "See you here tomorrow." And hope returned.

The shared feelings of excitement, pageantry, beauty, sadness and hope kept us suspended for a brief instant as part of one another. But in a quick shift of mood, the restlessness, the garrulousness, the diversity of the crowd returned.

Several people began loudly discussing the sunset, making comparisons with other sunsets they had seen. Have you ever heard critical reviews of the sunset? Self-made experts on the art of viewing, specialists in sun watching, each person was a poet in his or her comparisons of shapes,

colors, moods, feelings. We must all be talented in this area, and yet how few of us know it!

For many people, the climax having been reached, the sun having set, the show was over. The exodus from the boardwalk assumed large proportions, like the crowds draining away from Fifth Avenue at the end of the New York Thanksgiving Day parade. Cars and other vehicles streamed out of the parking lot and clogged streets for blocks around.

But back on the Boardwalk, they were doing something for an encore. A warm camaraderie had developed among those remaining. Spontaneous activity began along the length of the boardwalk. Three and four person combos, some singing, some dancing, began to entertain the wide circular audience forming around them. Some players were professional, hoping to get bookings at local discos. Others performed for enjoyment alone. The spectators clapped, swayed, sang along and some joined in the dancing, as gradually stars appeared in the Key West sky.

It finally occurred to me to look for Charlie. In all the excitement I had forgotten how I had come to the Key West sunset. Now I hurried from one group to another, seeking out somewhat similarly sized people. But it was no use. On the trip down, where only a handful of people were out on the beaches seeking shells or serenity, locating someone at sunset would have been easy. But at Key West, we were a throng of humanity and finding any one person was purely accidental.

Yet all of us, children and adults, friends and strangers, rich and poor, we had all been together for one of the best

shows on earth. We had shared a gift of nature, and we were all friends for that evening.

Though I never did find Charlie, I offered him my silent thanks for the unusual experience his invitation had given me. I was indeed richer for having met him; his few kind words, from one stranger to another, had provided me with a memory to be cherished for a lifetime.

3. Cuban Diary

12/23/79 to 1-3-80

An unusual window of opportunity opened in late 1979. By agreement between the Cuban and American governments, for a short time professional tours were permitted to travel from the United States to Cuba. A rare opening since the Castro government and the US were not on good diplomatic terms. My colleague, Helene, suggested we both join a tour for social scientists scheduled for the December 1979 Christmas season. And so I got to see Cuba 20 years after the Cuban revolution of 1959

On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro and his group of revolutionaries ousted the repressive Cuban dictator, Fulgencio Batista, and installed a government that became an ally of the Soviet Union. The United States broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba and imposed a trade embargo. American travel to Cuba was restricted except for Cuban-American relatives allowed to visit their families. For reasons that are not clear to me, during 1979 some professional tours from the U.S. to Cuba were permitted. And Helene and I went.

I am not a great tour enthusiast. I much prefer to do my own exploring rather than follow a commercially planned itinerary. I explained to Helene that I could be a "part-time" companion. I'd be with the tour for breakfast and dinner and travel on the tour bus from one city to another. But the daytime hours would be mine to explore as I wished - alone. That worked well. Helene is a very sociable person and soon had a bevy of friends around her during the times I was off by myself - traveling alone at least part of the time.

To my surprise, as American tourists there were few restrictions on our activities. We could move around at will and speak freely to people. And in general, Cubans are quite willing to speak with tourists and even have their pictures taken. Many speak English, have relatives in the United States, and ask many questions about American life. We were free to take photographs throughout the country, except for military installations, convoys and some special government buildings. American equipment from an earlier era are familiar sights – for example, 25 year old Chevrolets or 30 year old Underwood typewriters. Somehow they are kept in good mechanical condition and look bright and shiny.

Days 1 and 2. Havana

The first two days are in Havana followed by a ten-day 500 mile bus trip across the island, with stops at towns and cities along the way. While in Havana, I make my way through the streets walking by myself. I soon realize that Havana is a city of great contrasts. I am struck by the condition of the streets and sidewalks. Lots of dangerous potholes and broken pavement. And no sign of repair crews. One has to proceed very carefully as the local population does.

City vistas are used for prominent public communication. For example, on the side of buildings, there are large representations of Che Guevara, Fidel Castro's trusted ally in the Cuban revolution. Che died in Bolivia in 1967. Although rumor has it that he had fallen out of favor with the Castro regime, his memory as a Cuban hero is very much alive.

Continuing my walk, I pass an Outdoor International Photo Exhibition. It is spectacular , magnificent! Superb photographs beautifully arranged. Music piped in - not Cuban -

more international - some modern beat – some Jewish - some American popular songs. And there are large crowds at the exhibit. I wonder, would a similar exhibition in New York attract similar crowds on a weekday morning? And why is this amazing exhibit not included on the tour itinerary?

Finally, I stop at a local restaurant for something to drink. Hardly anyone is there. One lone waiter goes to bring some soda. A woman seated at a nearby table starts a conversation with me. She tells me she is 64 years old, widowed, retired and on a pension. No children, but four brothers in the United States. She has U.S. permission to migrate to the U.S. permanently and waits for Cuban permission to leave. She has been waiting for years. Meanwhile she is bored and sits in the restaurant every day to pass the time away. Apparently she is not the only one in Cuba in such circumstance. The soda arrives. I drink, thank everyone, and go out to meet the tour group ready to return to our hotel.

As we are all getting ready to reenter the bus, a small boy on a bicycle races by, and in one fell swoop grabs the hat off one of our tourists and speeds away. Some in our tour group give chase shouting "Stop, thief!" and "Stop that boy!" A few local onlookers also race after the boy. Others assure us he would be caught and brought back with someone holding his wrists. They are right. Very shortly, the boy is marched back with a policeman on each side holding his wrists.

Suddenly, we become apprehensive. What will happen to this young boy for the prank of stealing a hat? How is justice meted out in this country?

We soon find out. The culprit walks shamefaced and frightened. The hat is returned. And the police escort the boy home to his parents to set the boy straight. End of incident.

Day 3. En route to Cienfuegos.

The next day we try to get an early start to our next city – Cienfuegos. But it is not to be. First a problem of misplaced luggage. Takes a while to find all the correct suitcases and load the cargo compartment. Next a delay about an unpaid bill. No idea what that is all about. Finally we leave about 11 am. But only for a short while. The bus breaks down at 1 pm. We mill around at a restaurant as the bus limps away. At 4 pm, the bus returns. The bus drivers turned into auto mechanics rather than phone Havana for another bus. We all get on the bus again and bounce along to our destination, Helene then discovers that our bottle of expensive dark Cuban rum that had been hiding in the overhead compartment, is gone. Javier, our Cuban tour guide, assures us that no way would the drivers or anyone else take the rum while the bus was being repaired. Skeptical looks all around. But not much to be done.

At 7:30pm, we arrive at a somewhat rundown hotel in Cienfuegos with peeling wall plaster,

no hot water, and a mediocre restaurant. As a diversion however, on a vast lawn near the hotel are lots of sinks, toilets, pipes of various sorts, faucets, and other fixings - an outdoor plumbing supply fair. Despite the late hour, many people walk up and down the aisles examining the merchandise and negotiating with the exhibitors.

And so to bed.

Day 4. – Shopping in Cienfuegos.

Finding items to take home as mementos of my trip is a challenge. Many stores have two sections. On one side it is "Venta Libre" That means you can buy the items without a ration card essentially a free market.. Items in Venta Libre are meant for tourists, foreigners, and wealthy Cubans. They are high fashion imports largely from the Soviet Union and eastern European countries. And expensive.

The other side of the store is for local consumption. Very inexpensive, practical, subsidized by the government and rationed to the Cuban public. Quite a difference in a country designed for the proletariat.

Many stores admit shoppers a few at a time. Others wait outside patiently for their turn to shop. Streets are lined with people waiting to buy things. Only in the lovely Cuban warmth could this system work. I think of New York in frigid December and shake my head at the idea.

I pass a store with men's shirts in the shop window. A few are adorned with little red devilish figures and look like something my two sons might enjoy showing off. Deciding to try to buy them, I stand on line and wait. Two men on the line ahead of me say I need ration coupons for this purchase. They point to the other side of the store– the Venta Libre side - and say to shop there instead. Before I can leave, a woman behind me taps my arm and indicates to stay where I am. Surprised, I point to the shirts I want to buy. She nods approvingly. Soon I am in the store and at the head of the line. I wonder how to negotiate my primitive Spanish with the saleswoman. There is no need. The saleswoman already understands the whole deal. All she asks is "How many?" I

say "Two." I pay her. She wraps the shirts, writes something down on her tally sheet, moves a couple of ration tickets from one pile to another, and the transaction is complete. The woman behind me smiles, hugs me, and we say "Adios."

My next effort is to buy something for my daughter. And there it is on the next street in a high fashion Venta Libre store - a beautiful purse imported from Russia at a price most Cubans cannot afford. I try the door (there are no lines waiting here) and it is locked. A man comes from inside, unlocks the door and tells me they close at noon. I point out that it is only 11:45 am. He shrugs. However when I say I want to buy the purse in the window, he promptly ushers me in. And we conclude the sale with lots of smiles.

Day 5. – We are in Trinidad – a historic city.

I learn that English is a required subject for all students in the 7th grade. Other languages are optional. Since many adults in Cuba have less than a 6th grade education, it is only the younger set that has to study English. The government is conducting a campaign to induce everyone to achieve at least a 6th grade education. There are billboards and posters all over announcing the campaign.

Walking around the city, I notice that houses are very dilapidated. I am told many are nicely furnished inside. I have no opportunity to find out. Tourists, especially from the USSR and eastern Europe, are familiar to Cubans and are welcomed. Americans are likewise appreciated. Contrary to scenes in other Caribbean countries, there is no begging in the streets. Clothing is simple, neat, and clean, and both adults and children seem adequately nourished. The gov-

ernment subsidizes meals for children at school and for workers at their place of employment. The children however are delighted if offered “Chiclets” or a ball point pen.

Around 1 pm I am at the town square near a school where the students are returning from lunch for the afternoon. Recognizing me as a tourist, a boy comes over and asks if I can read English. Tourists from the USSR read only Russian. I say yes and he asks if I would read his English homework assignment. English class meets right after lunch. I agree.

As I open the textbook, I notice there are now 10 young people milling around to hear my rendition of their lesson. I read slowly and carefully. “My - grandmother – sits - in- the - armchair. Does – your – grandmother - sit –in – the - arm-chair?” The students are delighted. The school bell rings. They all shout “Gracias, Senora” and dash off to class. I am left alone on the village square, happy to have been of help.

As I continue my walk, I pass a beautiful church and venture inside. I see the famous altar, hand carved a long time ago by a monk from France. Truly a work of art. The church is named Jesus Christ of Vera Cruz. I am told the local legend. Jesus Christ was sailing to Vera Cruz when the ship was caught in a violent storm and landed on the Cuban coast.

Day 6. – An Adventure in Camaguay.

The next day we are in Camaguay, and I learn that there is a Psychiatric Hospital on the outskirts of town. Cubans are very proud of their medical care. Unlike the skewed availability of care under the Batista regime, the Castro government reorganized the health care system to bring medical

care to all segments of the population. And apparently they have done it well.

I decide to see for myself and try to visit the Psychiatric Hospital. Our Cuban tour guide and the hotel staff try to discourage me. They tell me one needs advance approval and only with a compelling reason might a tourist visit the hospital.

However, a local Cuban English teacher comes to the rescue. She offers to arrange with a reliable taxicab driver she knows to take me there and back for a set fee.. And to wait there while I have a chance to look around at the hospital. The cab driver is also skeptical. But business is business. He agrees to the terms and takes the money in advance.

It is about an hour's ride out of town to the hospital. The driver keeps me occupied with a running commentary in Spanish about the countryside, the country, and other topics of which I have no idea. I say a lot of "Mms," "Ahs," and other internationally understandable murmurs, and we finally arrive at the Psychiatric Hospital.

The driver stops at the entrance where there is a watchman to whom he explains why I am there. The watchman eyes me suspiciously and shakes his head to indicate the equivalent of "No way." I tell him I am on a professional tour from the United States and ask very politely if he would please phone the director so that I may speak with him directly. Reluctantly he does. It turns out the director is not in today but the assistant director is willing to see me. Within a few minutes a young Indian student comes out and escorts me into the building to meet Dr. Juan Roberto. Dr. Roberto, an earnest young man, offers me orange juice and then spends

an hour talking and showing me around. That is much more than I had anticipated, and I am very thankful.

He speaks in Spanish with a few English words. Though he has never been out of Cuba, Dr. Roberto is fluent in Russian - but not in English. And I struggle with my makeshift Spanish, hoping I am not making too many gaffes.

First Dr. Roberto tells me about the patients.. More women than men are hospitalized for neuroses and hysteria. The incidence of depression and schizophrenia is about the same for men and women – perhaps a little more men than women. But on the whole somewhat similar to the U.S. experience - the influence of genetics in mental illness he says. Cuba has no drug addiction problem and very little alcoholism – perhaps 1% or 2%. He then asks me what accounts for the high incidence of drug addiction in the United States. I try to explain that the major addiction problem in the U.S. is alcoholism, not drugs. He says from what he reads, he does not believe that. That I must be mistaken. No way can I convince him, so I give up.

He tells me that in the hospital, they use the team approach to psychiatric care - psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, attendants. And they rely heavily on work therapy to effect improvement in patients.

He takes me on a very short tour of part of the building – mostly to show me patients in work therapy scrubbing floors, cleaning windows, working in the laundry, and other similar activities. When patients are well enough to leave the hospital, they are expected to register at a government employment office to continue with work therapy. But there is a catch. The employment agencies do not

accept anyone without a 6th grade education. So older folks who may not have that background are left in the lurch. I do not learn what provisions are made for them.

According to Dr. Roberto, before the Cuban revolution, there was only one clinic for psychiatric problems in the whole province. There are now 36 clinics functioning. He is justly proud of that.

Finally he gallantly escorts me back to the watchman and my taxi driver. I try to thank him enough for his kindness. I do not know if my Spanish matched my gratitude. But I did try.

The taxi driver is silent on the way back. He probably is still amazed that I got in to see the assistant director of a psychiatric hospital.

Day 7. - Camaguay in the Morning

I am up at 8 am the next morning – a beautiful sunny day. Cuba has wonderful climate especially at this time of year – winter. Ready for a walk in the cool morning air, I see Lily, another of our tourists, also up and on the same quest. We go together, chat and observe the small thatched roof roughly hewn homes with square openings for windows but no glass. Good for the fine weather but a problem when it rains. The houses are called bohios. We wonder what they look like inside.

We are soon to find out. In the small yard in front of one of the bohios, a woman is out tending some flowers. Lily and I stop to compliment her garden. It is lovely. After

exchanging a few pleasantries (Lily's Spanish is much better than mine), in true Spanish tradition – *mi casa, su casa* - the woman invites us in. She shows us around the house – kitchen, living room, two bedrooms – all small and dark – with simple, neat furnishings from another era. There is no running water and we see no bathroom.

The woman tells us about the misery before the revolution, the poverty, the hunger, and the great inequality in health and other services. She feels things are better since Castro took over, Food is adequate though some items, like meat, flour, and sugar, are rationed. And rationing is a problem. Clothing she says does not matter much to her.

Still all the while, the woman keeps eyeing my tee shirt – a short sleeved yellow turtle neck. She asks about the fabric and I invite her to touch it. After several more of her admiring glances, I ask if I may go into the other room. Fortunately I had a light jacket over my shoulders. When I come out, I hand the woman the yellow tee shirt and wear my jacket buttoned up. The joy in the woman's face fills the whole living room. We hug, and Lily and I leave to go to our hotel for breakfast.

Day 8. – A Change of Pace at Guarda La Vacca

Guarda La Vacca is a coastal town designed to be a playground and vacation spot for tourists and Cubans who can afford to come. The motel we stay at is brand new and built by the Russians as part of some reciprocal deal with Cuba. It looks bright and new on the outside, and we are delighted. However, soon we find out that the water

in the bathroom sink rises before it drains. It makes us wonder about the plumbing. Also we notice an occasional cockroach.

However, there is the wonderful beach outside, the sparkling Atlantic Ocean, and a host of Russian tourists. A pleasant change from the interminable bus rides and city sights.

On the beach where we are all in bathing suits, the differences between Russians and Americans seem very small. Though we do not understand each other's language, we soon learn that communication does not depend on words but on similar life styles. Using gestures and drawing pictures in the sand, we discover that these Russians tourists are largely professional engineers, factory managers, and other minor dignitaries from Kazakstan, a Soviet province in Central Asia. Aeroflot, the Soviet airline, flies them to Cuba at very low cost and these vacations are perks from their jobs. We inquire how many are in their group – they write 38 in the sand. They ask about our group and we write 37. I point to the Russians and say, "You win!" Somehow they understand, and we all laugh and applaud. With lots of pantomime and sand pictures, the Russians invite us to meet after dinner for dancing in the social hall. We agree and enjoy a lovely time that evening, complete with toasts for peace and friendship. Why does anyone think it is hard to negotiate with the Russians, we wonder.

Day 9. – Negotiating with Cuban Teenagers

We are still in Guarda La Vacca enjoying another day of Rest and Recreation. The Russians are out on the beach

with us and inform us that in the bushes behind us there is a market for exchanging conch shells for Russian or American cosmetics. Apparently this free enterprise effort is frowned upon by the authorities and so it is kept secret. The exchange rates are flexible and vary with the sellers – teen age divers who secure conch shells of various sizes from the sea. No money is exchanged but a half bottle of perfume commands a beautiful large shell. Partially used lipsticks are valuable exchange items. Also talcum powder, lotions, hair products, and so on - all are negotiable. I notice that both Russians and Americans carry bulky items in their towels as they leave the beach.

Days 10 to 11. –Santiago del Cuba - the last leg of our journey.

We leave Guarda La Vacca, the ocean, and the Russians, and make our way south to Santiago del Cuba, a fairly large city on the easternmost part of the island. It is 500 miles from Havana, the distance we covered in our bus riding, and almost diametrically across the island, from Havana on the northwestern coast to Santiago on the southeastern. Santiago is very close to the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, the America installation that the United States first leased from the Cuban government in 1903. Though Guantanamo is nearby, it is off limits to us.

Before we reach Santiago, we stop at Granma to see the boat of the same name from which Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries launched an early unsuccessful attack against the Batista regime. But this is not a political tour, and we spend little time at Granma.

Our time in Santiago is a crowded, varied experience. In Guarda la Vacca we had acquired a new set of bus drivers,

one of whom claimed to be a practitioner of santería, the Cuban form of spiritualism. Similar to espiritismo in Puerto Rico, voodoo in Haiti, or candomble in Brazil, santería is a religious belief system that draws on Catholicism, native beliefs, and African practices. Our Cuban tour guide mentioned to the driver that I was interested in learning more about santería. When we reach Santiago in the afternoon, the bus driver tells me that because it is a holiday week, there are no santería activities scheduled. And anyway the government frowns on the practice, though they cannot stop it. But, if I am interested, he is a practitioner and would gladly demonstrate santería for me in his room this evening. I tell him, "How nice. I will invite several of the other tourists who are also interested." Dismayed, the driver shakes his head and mumbles something about perhaps another time. End of santería.

The next day Manuel, one of our tourists, and I decide to explore the city together. Manuel, originally from Cuba, is now an American citizen and has some special reason for being on this tour, information he does not share with us. But his Spanish is excellent and he makes a great companion for exploring the city.

We decide to look for a book store. A great many books are published in Cuba and sold at very low prices, a byproduct of the Cuban revolution. And there are lots of book stores across the country. However, we discover that on any one day different stores are closed for inventory. In those that are open, there seems to be no orderly retrieval system. We enter one and ask for books on Cuban history and also Cuban folklore. We are assured that they have them. There ensues a mad scramble

among the few salespeople to locate some – to no avail. They finally recommend that we try the stores that are closed for inventory today. When they open, they should be able to locate what we want. We say thanks and leave.

I suggest a visit to a typical supermarket next. A “typical” supermarket is not quite like what we see in the U.S. While larger than a bodega, it is still rather small and somewhat shabby. I am carrying a camera and look every bit the tourist. Immediately we are confronted and told cameras are not allowed and anyway the store is for Cubans. Then the manager, an officious looking woman, probably in her late 40’s, comes over to usher us out of the store. However between Manuel’s native Spanish and my indicating I would like to take her picture, she relents. But we must wait until she makes the store presentable for the camera. Immediately empty wooden bins are filled with pale apples and small potatoes. Floors are quickly swept. And everyone tries to get into the picture. We thank the manager and take her picture with several co-workers against whatever background she wishes. Then we are allowed to wander around the store if we wish, but no more pictures! I put the camera away, and Manuel and I roam around. The meat counter is gleaming with freshly washed white shelves - which are completely bare. We are told that the store has no meat to sell today. So why is the butcher standing behind the counter in a clean white apron and doing nothing? The answer is because that is his job. On days when meat is available, of course he fills orders and sells meat. On other days, he simply stands there and leaves when the store closes. On the other hand, the grocery counters are busy

with people stocking up on other rationed items before they run out. There is a long printed list on the wall specifying what and how much is rationed and what is not. It is all confusing to me.

By now we've had enough of shopping, and Manuel and I return to the hotel to be ready for the New Year's Eve celebration at Cespedes Park. This big event includes bands playing spirited music in the park and a few (political?) speeches. And at midnight, a fireworks display.

We all walk the two miles from the hotel to the park. The park is crowded and all the benches and other seats are taken by the time we get there. I and some of our other tourists manage to stand in front of about 30 people who also do not have seats. We wait for midnight when fireworks are shot off from the roof of a nearby building.

As loud applause greets the fireworks, we notice that all is not going well. Instead of flying high into the air, the fireworks are making a horizontal path just over our heads and dropping live sparks on us. A catastrophe! Suddenly the mob of standees rushes forward to escape the sparks. And I and a few others in front are knocked to the ground with the crowd surging around us! Unable to get up, we are terrified by the stampede. Suddenly a remarkable thing happens. Several local onlookers rush over. They deflect the crowd, help us up and take us out of danger. We are in shock - but no casualties. Except for the fireworks which are over for the year. And my white shirt, a souvenir I still have with small burnt holes from the sparks of 1980. It is a memento of Santiago del Cuba and the wonderful Cubans who saved my life.

Havana again

Finally we fly to Havana for the end of our tour. I still have one more task to take care of.

My hairdresser in New York urged me to visit her old uncle in Havana. I said I would try and now I begin to wonder whether it is a good idea. She had mentioned that he is an elderly gentleman, a widower. He had been a very successful doctor for wealthy patients during the pre-Castro Batista era.

When I phone, he is very suspicious. But when I mention his niece's name, he invites me to visit at his medical office. It is a sad visit. Here is a lonely old man, in an antiquated medical office where he sees few if any patients. He has little income and feels under suspicion by the Castro government all the time. All his close relatives are in the United States and he cannot get permission to go to them. He gets along with some help from his part time nurse, a distant relative. And he receives money and items from relatives in the United States.

Apparently a great deal of American money flows into Cuba from the United States. Cuban-Americans who come to visit (which is allowed) buy lots of food, clothing, and other items to leave with their relatives. Others send money from the United States to make life easier in Cuba. And so it is for this elderly doctor.

I tell him the little I know about his niece. I don't know what else to say. I wish him well and leave.

Our last day.

In our tour bus going to the airport, we sing a medley of national anthems. In honor of our new Russian acquaintances, some who know it sing the Internationale. Others of us answer with the Star Spangled Banner. And a few who also want to participate sing La Marseillaise – the only foreign anthem they know.

Never mind that our chartered plane is delayed. That we have no idea why or when we will take off. We are already accustomed to the Cuban way of doing things. There will be plenty of time on the flight to Miami to join the American scene again.

4. Israeli Recollections

On June 14, 1981, I boarded an El Al airplane at Kennedy Airport in New York en route to Israel. I had an aisle seat. My seat partner at the window preferred the aisle and she asked if I would change seats with her. I did.

Soon the steward came over to verify the special meal I had ordered. Without even checking my name, he asked why I had changed my seat. How did he know that? I did not ask.

An uneventful but long trip. Little sleep and a 10 hour time difference when I got there. My good friend, Anna and her cousin Anya were to meet me at the airport. Anna, a sabra born in pre-Israel Palestine, lived and worked in the city of Beersheva at the edge of the Negev Desert. Anya had migrated from Rumania as a small child, and was living on a kibbutz ever since.

I was eager to see Anna again and to meet her cousin. Finally they arrived - only one-half hour late. Things are not so prompt in Israel, I discovered.

After a warm greeting, the women took charge and, grabbing my luggage, herded me into Anna's car for the 45 minute ride to my "new home" in Kiryat Nordau, a suburb outside the Mediterranean coastal city of Netanya.

However, my jetlag notwithstanding, they first had to show me the beach at Netanya. "You'll catch up on sleep later," they told me. "Better to stay awake until late in the day." They were probably right – but I was very drowsy just the same.

The beach was wide and sandy and, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, had fierce currents from time to time.

We did not try the sea but just looked at it. Blue, beautiful, and beckoning!

Next stop was an ice cream shoppe. Both women felt I needed refreshments. I didn't think so, but I ordered waffles and ice cream anyway. Anya ordered coffee with ice cream. And Anna wanted a banana split. All items on the menu. The waiter served Anya and me first. Anna said to start since her order would take a little longer. And she was right. We waited and waited for her to be served. Finally upon request, the waiter announced that they had sent a waitress out to buy a banana and she had not yet returned. Anna canceled the order, and we left the shoppe.

On to Kiryat Nordau, and into a relatively new 12 story apartment building. I had sublet an 11th floor apartment from a young couple who were now living in Brooklyn, New York. The wife's parents owned the apartment and the young couple used it only when they came to visit. Otherwise they were all happy to have tenants the rest of the time.

The place was light and airy with lots of windows and sea breezes wafting in from the Mediterranean about a mile away. The furnishings were sparse but adequate and it was roomy and comfortable. In general a good choice considering I had taken it sight unseen. My two friends agreed, got me settled, and left.

The purpose of my trip was to complete a comparative study of the resettlement of Soviet Jewish refugees in the United States and Israel. The American portion of the project was done, and it seemed to me that the Israeli part should not be too difficult. I had the names of several Israelis who would help me get started.

However it now occurred to me that I was in a foreign land with no car and no telephone, not to mention my meager knowledge of the country's language, Hebrew. What was I thinking of when I planned this trip?

The next day, the owner of the place, Mr. H. came over to meet me and make sure everything was in working order. He and his family had migrated to Israel from Libya several years before. He now prospered as a builder and apartment owner. When he came in, given my New York habits, I immediately closed and locked the door. What a mistake! Mr. H. took that as an invitation for a tete-a-tete. When I repulsed his attentions and ordered him to leave, he turned a bright red, was full of apologies and said his wife would take care of things in the future. A welcome resolution to a scary incident! Later in the day, I discovered that my gold pen, a gift from a student before I left, was gone from the table where I had left it. Mr. H's revenge?

Having brought some canned goods and granola bars with me from home, I stayed in and slept for the rest of the day. The evening brought a pleasant encounter with Itzak, my 21 year old next door neighbor.

Itzak and his family had come from Morocco to Israel not long ago. He worked as a house painter, was planning to be married as soon as he earned enough money, and in general was a sweet, open, caring young man.

He introduced himself and asked if he could be of help in any way. I asked about telephones. Oh, Itzak told me, it took a long time to get a phone once you apply. I would not be in Israel long enough for that, he said. However, he was fortunate to have a telephone and I was welcome to use it

whenever I needed to. Since he left for work at 6 am every morning, I could come in after that time to make my phone calls. He would give me a key to the apartment. A remarkable offer!

Itzak invited me to see the apartment and to show me the telephone. And he made sure the door stayed wide open all the time I was there. I was learning about Israeli customs.

His apartment was small, clean and neat. And had practically no furniture. One chair, a makeshift table, a mattress on the floor for a bed. And a TV and a telephone.

What kindness however! It made a big difference to my comfort and well-being to have Itzak for a next door neighbor.

I spent the next few days learning to work in Israel. Phoning contacts for appointments was often an exercise in futility. The phones do not always work. When they do, people do not always answer them. And when they do, I often cannot understand what they are saying. Total chaos!

I decided to just go where I needed to and hope the people I wanted to see would be available. That process seemed quite common and acceptable. I was always offered a drink of water with jam and sometimes a cookie. It was very hot at this time of year in Israel and keeping hydrated was vital.

I discovered to my chagrin that one had to arrange the day's business in the morning until about 10:30 am and then again after 3:30 pm or 4 o'clock. Going out between 11 and 3 can be harmful. I learned that the hard way after spending two days at home recovering from too much exposure walking in the midday sun.

Lots to get used to when one is not a tourist but living and trying to work in a foreign land. It took me a while, but I finally made connections with Soviet families and continued my interviewing and comparative study. I was surprised and delighted with the cooperation and encouragement I received from Israeli organizations and from Soviet families themselves. That turned out to be much easier for me than the daily challenges of trying to figure out bus schedules or learning the names of foods I wanted to buy or knowing the hours that restaurants, post offices, and other public places were open or closed. Lots to learn in a foreign country.

After a couple of weeks, my friend Anna and I were invited to dinner on a Saturday evening to the home of a couple we both knew. I had not seen them since their visit to United States several years before. Anna would pick me up in her car and drive us to Netanya to the dinner. I looked forward to a very pleasant evening

But like other best laid plans, I waited and waited for Anna to show up. She didn't. I waited some more and finally resorted to eating what I had in the refrigerator and eventually went to sleep. With no phone and no car, there was not much else I could do. Nobody could reach me either.

The next day, Sunday, Anna came by. "What happened?" I asked. "Oh," she said casually, "my car broke down on the way and I had to leave it in a garage overnight. There was no way I could reach you – or our hosts." "Wouldn't they be worried or upset?" I asked. "Oh no," Anna replied. "When they saw we were not there, they would know we were not coming. Anyway, they don't have a telephone either." So it goes!

After several weeks, my work was finishing and my stay in Israel coming to a close. Still there was one last experience I will never forget.

Anya, my friend Anna's cousin, invited Anna and me to spend my last weekend as guests at her kibbutz. I was happy to see her again and looked forward to learning about life in an Israeli agricultural cooperative settlement. We arrived at the kibbutz, located about half a mile inland from the Mediterranean Sea, just in time for the Sabbath evening meal. We barely had time to drop our belongings in Anya's modest two-room bungalow, change into fresh clothes and go to the dining room.

In this large, somewhat bare communal room, I was struck by the contrasting warmth that surrounded me. Though a newcomer to everyone, I was greeted and welcomed as a long-awaited relative, wished "Shabbat Shalom" and urged to eat heartily of the Middle Eastern and European food set out on long wooden tables. A guitar interlude ushered in the Day of Rest. Then everyone settled down to the Sabbath meal.

The two cousins and I were left to ourselves. "We have something to show you after dinner," Anna said. Her cousin nodded in agreement.

When we finally left the warm bright dining room, the evening air was already cooling. The new moon was visible. The first stars were out. It was going slowly from twilight into night. The cousins suggested a walk to the sea. I was interested and readily agreed.

As we started out, I realized that we were leaving the built-up settlement and going toward a large empty expanse.

Anya said that very high sand dunes stood guard between the populated community and the untamed shore. We would have to go far up on the warm shifting dunes to get a reward – an unexpected Olympian view of the water beyond. That sounded good to me.

As we followed a non-existent path into the sandy void, each woman seemed lost in her own thoughts. I found the going rough, and without a flashlight almost fell into the soft earth a few times. I thought the two cousins somewhat impatient with my faltering steps. Surefooted themselves, they led me rather quickly through this mysterious area. Then they began to talk about the desolate beach ahead.

“You know, this unlikely spot was a port of illegal entry from Europe during and soon after World War II,” Anna said suddenly. I was amazed. I had not expected so close a brush with history.

“Oh, yes,” her cousin continued in a subdued tone, “before we had the State of Israel, this was a mighty busy place.”

I felt a chill there in the quiet semi-darkness, and wondered what revelation was yet to come. But the two just took turns matter-of-factly describing the leaky, rusty ships with their makeshift, often untrained crews that spirited, to the relative safety of British-controlled Palestine, Jews marked for extinction in Holocaust Europe.

“We know how competent the Germans were with their gas chambers.” Anna’s voice was sharp. “Well, the British, and most other nations too, were just as competent in refusing asylum in Palestine, or elsewhere for that matter, to anyone

who escaped without appropriate visas or other documentary permits from officialdom."

Anya continued almost nonchalantly, "So we had illegal boats, illegal immigrants, and the illegal reception committee here on the beach."

"How awful!" I couldn't find the right words. "It must have been frightening."

Anya started a little. Then she answered in a low, kind, yet piercing tone, "You know what fear is? It's waiting in the dark on the beach for hours and hours, with hot tea, bread, wine, shoes, blankets, and stretchers if need be, and the boat doesn't come."

Anna shuddered as she continued the story. "And what about when a boat did come? And we waded into the cold sea in the middle of the night to help people off into the water with their meager possessions, and put them on dry land. Then waded out again to carry the weak and the sick to the shore?"

Anya quietly added, "And finally wondered if once again we'd be able to move all the newcomers five miles inland before the morning light."

I tried to help. "Couldn't you put them up in the kibbutz at least over night? Why try to transport a bunch of weary people, especially the frail and the sick, to another city in the dark?" I shook my head in wonder.

Anna said, not quite as gently as her cousin, "You see, when you're afraid the British police will throw you in jail for

receiving illegal immigrants, when you know they will send the newcomers back to Europe on the same broken-down boat that brought them here, when you've seen that foolish mistakes prevented ships from arriving in the dead of night because the patrols knew where to find them, then you are not only scared - you are cold with terror." After a moment she added, "And you're highly motivated to move."

"And what about the people who got off the boats," I

persisted. "Did they have the strength? Did they have the motivation?"

"They had to." A simple clipped answer.

After a while, Anya sighed. "Yes, this was the path on which we trudged. And we continued on the five-mile trek with people weeping, ordering other people around, hushing little children. All of us were nervous and we were very, very tired."

Another pause.

Then she said, "Remember, Anna, the time that young immigrant fell asleep on top of the highest sand dune?"

Anna could not resist a little chuckle. "Oh yes, Anya, I remember. And none of us discovered him until the next morning." Addressing me, she added, "When he woke up, he couldn't figure out where he was!"

"And what about the time that young woman came off the boat and said her brother was in the area, and did we know him? She said he had only recently escaped and come to Palestine."

"That's right, Anya. And it seemed so funny that someone would think we'd know every immigrant who crossed the beach in the night."

"But the laugh was on us. He was right there with us already meeting and helping other new arrivals."

"Yes," said Anna. "But he didn't even recognize his own sister who had passed him on the beach." They laughed together and we continued walking.

The night became quiet. We had reached a little overhang over the beach and we rested on the sandy rocks. Each was left with her own thoughts.

I was a stranger to the area, to the history, to the memories. I could only imagine the sounds and try to conjure up the people. What I saw mostly was the beauty of the sea rolling in and the white water of strong waves breaking on the beach and receding.

But the two cousins were seeing something else. They were subdued, angry, self-absorbed. They and I were worlds apart.

On the way back, a different story. Some years ago, Anya had been walking by herself through this empty, deserted area when a young Arab appeared from behind a scrubby bush. She recoiled at the memory, and her cousin mentioned the folly of maneuvering alone in this territory.

"What happened?" I gasped.

"Nothing," she shrugged.

How little I understood!

She added quietly, "He didn't follow - that time."

So we walked back through the soft sand, whose color I could no longer determine. It was night, and the moon was very faint. The small lights of the kibbutz houses were not yet visible in the distance.

I had said to Anna when we first started out, "Won't we need a flashlight? It'll be dark when we return."

She had merely smiled and shook her head.

Now she told me in a quiet voice, "You see - barefoot, we used to lead people through the dark on this path when we were thirteen years old."

I began to see – without a flashlight.

Note:

For those interested, the following are two articles I published about my research with Soviet Jewish immigrants.

"Two Families, Three Generations, One Story." Ch.4 in *New Lives: the adjustment of Soviet Jewish immigrants in the United States and Israel*. Rita J. Simon, ed. 1985. Lexington, MA: Lexington Press.

"Perceptions of Aging East and West: Soviet Refugees See Two Worlds." 1986. *Journal of Cross-cultural Gerontology*. 1:4. 411-428

5. 30 Years Ago in the Lion Mountain

Vignettes of Life in Sierra Leone

Hot. Humid. Intensely green. Perspiring people, palm oil, and the sea This is Africa south of the Sahara and my first visit to Sierra Leone – the Lion Mountain.

My previous African visits had been to the northern part of the continent - to the dry, tan, desert-plagued countries of Egypt and Senegal. I had learned about sand in your room and in your teeth. I had felt the strong Moslem presence in both religion and culture. And the overlay of Western influence from the Nile Hilton Hotel in Cairo, where you can get a cottage cheese salad and a doughnut with your coffee, to the scores of joggers in Adidas shoes running in the streets of Dakar, the Senegalese capital.

The Lion Mountain was drama on a different stage.

Introduction

As part of an International Studies research project, I was on a professional trip to Africa. In my free time, I could choose countries to visit and topics to explore. In 1984 I chose Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone is a small country of three to four million people in an area about the size of South Carolina. Its neighbors are the Atlantic Ocean on the west and Guinea and Liberia to the north, east and south. At latitude of 7-10 degrees above the equator, the country experiences very high temperatures and heavy rain fall.

Politically, Sierra Leone was a British colony until 1961, when it was given independence. The population is divided among eighteen indigenous ethnic groups, the largest and most important being the Temne in the north and the Mende in the south. In addition, in and around the capital, Freetown, are a large group of Creole people, descendants of black settlers from Great Britain and North America who escaped from slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries and came to Sierra Leone. The Creole population are among the more urban and influential people in the country. The official language of the country is English; the popular language is Krio, a mixture of Portuguese, English and other languages; and each ethnic group has its own particular language.

In 1984, the date of my visit, Sierra Leone was a botanically lush, economically poor, and internationally fairly disregarded country. The dreadful carnage and destruction of the late 1990's civil strife was still unforeseen and in the future.

Socially, the country in many ways fit the description by a Scottish salesman who remarked, "In no African language is there a word with the urgency of 'manana.'" To a Western businessman, this was a source of endless frustration. To me, it seemed a wholesome aspect. And as a single woman traveling alone, I was also able to enter a world my Scottish acquaintance knew nothing about - the world of women.

Arrival

Arriving at the country's major airport on an island just across from the capital city, Freetown, I was hustled along in a long, slow bus trip to a ferry crossing. There followed

great delays in boarding a rickety ferry jammed with local travelers and a few foreigners. Finally a long taxi ride to my hotel on the outskirts of Freetown – all vehicles of course using tropical open-air ventilation.

I arrived at the Mammy Yoko Hotel ready to collapse in a cool shower and drop into bed. However, I had not counted on the desire of even the most casual of acquaintances to fill me in about life in this country.

The person attending to my luggage and escorting me to my room stopped in the lobby in front of a huge portrait of an imposing woman in native dress with the bearing of a queen. This he told me proudly was Mammy Yoko, a paramount chief of the Mende nation around 1850, and a hero of her country. She had done many good things for her people and enjoys a status close to that of George Washington in the United States. Many legends exist about Mammy Yoko and her deeds, and he wanted me to know just how important a hotel this was to bear her name. He was telling me this, he said, because he thought I would be interested and impressed. Despite all my tiredness, I was.

The Next Day

The next day I learned something of life upcountry in a rural community. A Turkish woman, an orthodontist, and her German medical doctor husband were en route back to Germany. They had just spent a month at a medical clinic far north of Freetown. In the hotel lobby where she and I met by chance, she began describing life in the area she had just left.

Food was a problem. Mostly lots of rice and fruits and vegetables. Everything seemed to grow in Sierra Leone. But little or no meat. And no eggs. During their month long stay, she was able to buy only one egg, and paid the equivalent of one dollar for it.

Families upcountry are very eager for children, she continued. If a couple does not have children, the wife will sleep with another man. She will sleep with as many men as necessary until she becomes pregnant. This in no way interferes with her marriage or her relationship with her husband. Of course, if the woman herself is barren, this system does not work.

Women presumably do not enjoy sex because of female circumcision – the practice of removing the clitoris in young unmarried girls. I would learn more about this practice another time, from another woman.

Several hours later, I had the chance to visit the National Museum in Freetown. The Museum is in the center of the city, facing the country's most famous landmark, the revered 500-year-old giant Cotton Tree. The story is told that in earlier times whenever a boatload of escaped former slaves arrived in Freetown, their first stop was at the Cotton Tree to worship and give thanks for their free and safe arrival.

The National Museum is a very small building with a few tiny, dark, dusty rooms and a rather fine collection of the country's artifacts. Admiring the fertility dolls on display, I approached the woman on duty, the only other person in the museum, and asked where I might possibly purchase one. She looked hopeful and suggested I speak with the Mu-

seum Director, who was just coming in. The Director was a thin, sharp, tired-looking person, glad to find a foreign visitor interested in African artifacts. He gave me a card that said "Self-Help Art Shop" with an address, and arranged to meet me there soon after the museum closed.

When I reached the address, I found the Museum Director in front of a very tiny shop, his arms filled with items for me to look at. After considering a few artifacts, I found myself attracted to a 15-inch high, carved wooden figure of a woman. The piece looked old and weathered. There was long, thin crack in the body, and the wood was broken where there should be feet.

My seller assured me it was an authentic Mende symbol of female power. He goes out regularly into the countryside on something like a scavenger hunt, to find items of this type, which have been discarded over the years and left in the fields or the jungle. Those of the best quality he saves for display in the National Museum. Others just below museum quality, like this one because of the crack, he sells in his Self-Help Art Shop. This wood carving was a representation of one of the symbolic spirits of the Sande, a system of secret societies among the women of the Mende.

As an anthropologist, I knew that in each community, all adult women are required to belong to the local Sande society. At gatherings in the forest, young girls stay for long periods of time to undergo initiation rites and female circumcision, and are trained in the performance of adult activities by older women. Society leaders hold trials for people who have committed crimes, and mete out punishments. These societies are held in great awe, and often wield

much political power. There is a parallel system of male secret societies called Poro, for the male population.

When a secret society meets, its own unique spirit in the form of a wood carving is placed in the ground during all activities and rituals. The figures are made without feet because the legs are stuck in the ground anyway.

The Museum Director said the piece that I liked was not very old. Wooden objects deteriorate quickly in this hot, wet climate.

We agreed on a price that pleased both of us, though I no longer remember what it was, and I took the wood carving. Upon my return to America, I looked in Elsy Leuzinger's book, *Africa; The Art of the Negro Peoples*, and found photographs of other Sande spirit carvings somewhat similar to mine. Also with no feet, and with the same explanation.

This figure from an African women's secret society now watches over me at home on a bookshelf at the entrance to my study. She still wears the yellowing tag that reads "Sande Bundu Society, secret society, mainly women. No.6". The price has been cut off. I still think she is great.

Before I left the Museum Director, I asked him what "Self-Help Art Shop" meant. He said, "I help myself to make more money because salaries for museum employees are so low." Good thinking.

A Visit from a Colleague

I had met Dr. Olayinka at an international women's conference in Holland a few years earlier. At the time, she

extended an invitation to visit her on my next West African trip. I looked forward to seeing her again.

Nigerian by birth, Ola had married a Sierra Leonean professor and now lived and practiced medicine in Freetown. I stopped by her office and left a note telling her of my arrival and including my hotel address and phone number. Instead of phoning me as I had expected, she chose to drive out to the hotel (less than 20 miles, but a one-hour trip) late in the day. She assumed – correctly – that the hotel phones were not working. I later discovered that they worked only one or two hours a day, but one never knew in advance which hours they would be. Success in phoning was like winning at roulette.

After dinner, I listened to her impassioned views about women's lives in Sierra Leone. She was conducting her own campaign, with or without allies, against female circumcision and childhood malnutrition, and for family planning and women's rights.

She gave me an in depth discussion on the drastic practice of clitoridectomy (female circumcision) found in many parts of Africa. In Sierra Leone, the practice involves cutting out the clitoris and removing the labia minor in young girls. Elsewhere the practice can be more extreme, with extensive cutting of the labia major and infibulations, sewing closed the whole genital area, except for a small opening for the expulsion of vital fluids.

Young girls are prepared for this torturous procedure at an early age. It is a way of bringing the young girl into the group, being accepted as a woman, being acceptable as a

wife by a man and his family, etc. The practice is hundreds of years old, and there are many rationales given for it.

It is supposed to protect young girls from sexual attack. Many work alone in the fields or at home, or travel alone. It guards the virginity of the woman and thereby the honor of the whole family. It promotes cleanliness (the reason for this was not clear to me). It promotes chastity and fidelity since women presumably have reduced sexual desires.

About this last point, Ola said actually the reverse is often true. Generally not able to reach orgasm, women are perpetually unsatisfied. Some keep looking for a man to "do it properly" for them, thus encouraging promiscuity.

Some African women however are not interested in sex, but want a home and children. They need the man to father a child, and will often refuse a husband's advances at other times. In general, men were not proficient with women. They have their own room and place to sleep. They come to a woman for quick sex, and then return to bed in their own lodging. In cases where infibulations was performed on the young girl, on the wedding night the husband must cut an opening for penetration. This is terrifying for the woman and can be disastrous for the relationship.

Performing female circumcision is strictly a female affair. Only women are involved, and the "surgery" is done at meetings of the women's secret societies. The techniques women use are secret, and no information is supposed to be revealed to others.

Ola is outraged by the whole scene. She urges Sierra Leonean mothers to refuse to let their daughters be cut. She sees some small progress so far, but it is very slow. Extending education for women may encourage them to say “no” to female circumcision. Also African governments need to pass strict measures to outlaw the practice. This last became a major recommendation one year later at the 1985 United Nations Conference for the 10th International Year of the Woman in Nairobi, Kenya, at which Ola represented her country.

A Trip into the Jungle

To get a picture of life in the hinterland, the hotel manager suggested my joining a group of tourists for a one-day journey to the village of Kai in a clearing in the forest about 30 to 40 miles southeast of Freetown. He told me there are about 200 people living in this village, which survives on farming on very fertile land and fishing in the nearby rivers and streams. At certain times during the year, the village of Kai hosts day tours from the big city (Freetown), to introduce city folk and foreigners to life in the countryside, provide a meal, and entertain with song, story, and dance. Through good fortune, one of these times coincided with my stay at the hotel, and I joined the trip.

With about 14 other people, mostly couples from various foreign countries, in a rather old station wagon and a native driver, we left the Mammy Yoko Hotel for the village of Kai. Leaving Freetown, we passed the city of Waterloo some twenty miles away; and after that, all paved roads ceased. The rest of the trip was into the jungle on very narrow overgrown paths with undulating roadbeds and water holes

that put American potholes to shame. The lush vegetation was taking over in many places, brushing the sides of the station wagon like a car wash. I shuddered to think what would happen if we met an oncoming vehicle.

As I understood it, this was the only "road" into the bush.

Today was the day the local population was required to do road work, a form of taxation involving men from well-hidden villages along the route. They spent the day from dawn to dusk clearing the road of the encroaching forest, with no pay for their work. Needless to say, this was not a favorite activity with the local populace, but looking for diversions was.

As we drove, or rather meandered, along, we saw a group of men in the distance, stripped to the waist in the heat, and wielding large machetes to chop down everything in sight. I was not prepared for the roadblock they immediately set up upon spotting our approach. The work force approached our vehicle, machetes menacingly high in the air.

For the moment, we passengers were terrified. We were quickly reassured however that the men were merely acting as "toll" collectors and that verbal jousting was the order of the day. After a brief animated argument, our driver handed over a few Leones (each Leone is equivalent to about 40 cents), the roadblock was removed, and with smiles and waving all around, we continued. However, this procedure was to be repeated every mile or so, and our progress slowed to a crawl.

At the next few "toll" stations, there were different resolutions. At one, a pack of cigarettes was an acceptable fee. At

another, the verbal exchanges between the driver and the workmen became so heated that I came forward and offered a five-Leone note. The driver made full use of this opportunity to taunt the men that "the Madame had to end the dispute." That was a mistake because then the workmen, feeling ashamed, refused to take the money.

However when it became clear that nothing more would be forthcoming, the donation was accepted with great thanks and applause and more waving.

When we finally arrived at Kai, we were exhausted and very hot.

Kai is a small, quiet, rural village where no word has the urgency of "manana." The village is made up of 20 small houses. With about 200 people, there tend to be 10 or more people living in most houses. The people belong to a few native ethnic groups, but mostly Temne or Shafrak.

The village elder, a dignified, soft-spoken man in his sixties, gave me bits of information about life in Kai. Many years ago, he had been a high school teacher in Freetown. After his father died, it was his duty, as the oldest son, to return to the village and look after the family land. He has been here ever since.

Though he is Christian, converted by an American missionary years ago, he has two wives. The expansion of his land holdings required a second wife and children to care for the extra farming. There is no such thing as hired hands. But he has seven grown children with his first wife; and his second wife just had her fifth child.

In the village, some families are Christian and others are Moslem, but all seem to follow African animist beliefs. People often attend both the Christian church in the next town and the mosque in Kai. Ethnic and religious differences do not interfere with village harmony. Religious doctrine is relatively elastic, and the needs of daily life prevail. The elder introduced me to his brother, also a charming, educated man, whose son was in the United States studying medicine at the University of Illinois.

A few boys in the village, but by no means all, are being educated at a local school. They proudly spoke English to me, and pointed out other boys saying, "They don't go to school. They cannot speak English." I doubt that any village girls attended school. From an early age, girls are very busy working alongside their mothers. They do not have leisure time like boys do.

The first wife of the village elder approached me with an invitation to join the women and girls in winnowing rice. I felt honored, and followed her to where this work was being done. Even on an entertainment day, women's work does not stop. With very little language in common, I was shown how to pound the harvested rice to separate the shell from the kernel. I proudly imitated their actions and received very approving nods. Then came the winnowing,

The rice kernels and shells are poured into large round flat sieves which must be lifted skyward with a quick jerking motion, propelling the lightweight shells up into the air. Then the sieve is pulled away quickly so that the heavier kernels remain in the sieve, and the shells fall to the ground. I watched the women and some of the older girls with interest. It did not

look easy, but their technique was flawless.

With kindness and smiles, I was handed one of the smaller sieves and encouraged to try. To the merriment of all the women, the older girls, and even the little ones who were standing around watching, I succeeded in throwing all the rice and shells on the ground. With my long years of American education, miscellaneous Western skills, and several attempts here at Kai, I could not master the art of rice winnowing. But I was treated like an honored guest because I had made the effort.

After a meal of skewered barbecued beef, onion, small roll, and an avocado, along with beer and fresh coconuts, prepared and served by the men, the music and dancing began. An area was cleared, with the tourist-audience seated on chairs on one side, and the local women and children standing behind a low barricade on the other side. The men and boys of the village stood around or lounged on the ground out of the way. Center stage was for the performers.

The dancers were young men of the village, especially talented and trained in a variety of routines. To be a village dancer was a position of great respect, a role to which many young boys aspired. The dancers, in a variety of brightly colored costumes, were totally acrobatic and moved with amazing physical skill and artistry. They were accompanied by a small band of enthusiastic musicians, all men, playing a variety of percussive and stringed instruments with a spell-binding African beat.

As the afternoon wore on, the dancing became more and more emotional and intricate, and several little boys at a far corner of the dance floor were trying desperately to imitate

the stars of the performance. One or two were so good; they were likely to compete for the mantle of chief dancer in a few years.

Finally the lead dancer, in appropriate costume and dancing like a lion in this Lion Mountain country, approached the stands to allow the tourists to tuck money into openings in the lion's mane, made especially for this purpose. This brought lots of cheers from the native audience and the visitors. Next, the "lion," with suggestive nods to the male tourists, took one or another of the visiting women to the dance floor with him. This brought great laughter, more cheers, and lots more money. And so the afternoon wore on - until finally the village women, whose role it had been to sing and clap during the dancing, chose to end the performance.

It was the decision the elder's first wife to determine when enough money had been collected, and the festivities should end. She simply led her women and their daughters on to the dance floor, the signal for the men to leave.

This time, she came over, took my hand, and had me join her in leading the final dance. The other women tourists were also asked to join, and the afternoon ended with uproarious dancing by women and young girls, while the men and boys stood aside and clapped and sang.

It was hard to leave the village of Kai. By the end of the day, we all felt a part of the life of these people. And "manana" was very far away.

A Morning at the Beach

Even in a tropical climate, a lovely sea breeze and a large thatched umbrella make a morning at the beach a delight-

ful experience. At the rear of the Mammy Yoko Hotel, a short path brings you to a wide, clean, white sandy beach facing a clear, blue Atlantic Ocean. I looked forward to the luxury of a few hours of solitude, reading, and relaxation.

Before I got too comfortable however, I noticed that the expanse of sand was dotted with many people, young and old - not sunbathers at all, but independent entrepreneurs gliding among the loungers selling their wares. Food, snacks, folk trinkets, jewelry, art figures, printed fabrics, magazines, soft drinks, all were available for a variety of prices. Under these conditions, trying to read a report on Senegal was like playing checkers on the New York subway.

Try as I might to discourage the market, vendors kept coming by with the persistence of door-to-door salesmen. I finally succumbed and bought two bananas. Alita, the fruit vendor, was interested in what I was reading, and we struck up a conversation. Alita said she is fourteen years old. She lives at the police barracks because her father is a policeman. Alita has four sisters and six brothers. Her mother is now back living at the police barracks too. I could not figure all this out. How many of the children also live at the barracks? Where had the mother been before? How long can they stay there? I chose not to ask questions.

Alita volunteered that she goes to school in Freetown. Schooling is not free for anyone in Sierra Leone, and Alita has to earn money. She works every afternoon after school, and all day on the weekends selling fruit at the beach. I ask if payment for school is so expensive. She reminds me that the money is not just for tuition. She also pays for clothes, books, uniforms, and incidentals. This keeps her busy year

round. Does her mother help? Yes, of course. Alita gives all her earnings to her mother, and her mother does the purchasing. I buy another banana.

I ask Alita how she can balance so heavy a basket of fruit on her head. She laughs. Young girls practice from the time they are 5 years old. The mother places a small round soft ring on the child's head, and sets an empty tray on the ring. The tray falls off of course - many times. By the time the girl is seven however, she has no trouble balancing a tray with a light load. After that, it is constant improvement with ever larger, sturdier rings and heavier loads. In the city, these rings are made of rolled up cloth. In the village where Alita was born, plant fibers are used. Alita gives me her warm, friendly, outgoing smile, and goes off to another potential customer.

Before I could process all this information, Palio comes over to fill Alita's spot. A middle-aged, short, stocky, relatively easy-going man, he is selling carved soapstone figures of unknown vintage. But they do have artistic merit, confirming West Africa's reputation for excellent carving. Thus, I find myself looking at the figures in spite of myself. This is not lost on Palio. He picks out the piece he sees me eyeing, and offers it as a "bargain" - an outrageous price! His price goes quickly from 450 Leones to 350 Leones (approximately \$225 to \$175). I tell him I am not the "rich tourist" he is looking for. He laughs and asks what I might pay. I demur saying I do not want to make him feel bad at my very low offer. But he persists. After all, "business is business" - if he does not like my price, he will not sell. I say 50 Leones. He says 150 L I say 50. He says 70. I say 60. We stop the discussion. He walks away; assuring me he will not sell this item to anyone else, but will think about the price. I realize I will go home with

the soapstone figure. When Palio returns, I offer him \$20 in American money and 20 Leones. He is delighted. And I have a somewhat unusual stone carving of a stylized native figure of unspecified pedigree. Back in my hotel room, I think about Alita and her schooling. Looking into written material I have, I note that Sierra Leone has a literacy rate of 15% and life expectancy of 46 years. With an infant mortality rate of about 50 per 1000, this life expectancy is not surprising. In 1984 in the United States, the infant mortality rate was about 10, and life expectancy about 75 years.

The literacy rate indicates a glaring educational void for a country hoping at some point to flourish in the modern world. Formal education is available for the very few. Of the over three million population with a very high birth rate, one may assume that close to one and one-half million would be of school age. In the late 1970's, total enrollment in primary schools was 250,000 and in secondary school and beyond another 65,000. Thus only about one in five young people receive any kind of formal education. This situation reflects the absence of free public education, the unavailability of schools in many areas, the poverty of the population, and the low place of education in national priorities.

Furthermore, schooling for girls is usually limited to the primary grades; students in secondary schools and above are mostly male. Obviously, most children in Sierra Leone, girls or boys, receive no formal schooling at all.

In view of this situation, Alita is probably one of the luckier children. As a girl, she is attending secondary school. In supplying funds for her education, she is becoming a proficient business woman. And she has the encourage-

ment of a supportive family. In my mind, I admire her resourcefulness, and hope she has a successful and happy life.

A Farewell Lunch

Before the end of my stay, Ola invited me to lunch at her home. Having seen her office in downtown Freetown, a few small rooms crowded with old furniture in various stages of disrepair, with old-time sterilizers for hypodermic syringes, and medical equipment that I had not seen since my childhood, I was curious about the interior of a Sierra Leone home.

I knew there were great differences in lifestyle between the elite and the vast majority of the population. I had come in contact with begging mothers carrying emaciated, pathetic-looking babies on crowded Freetown streets. I had seen rows of tiny shacks, leaning on each other in narrow streets, with no windows and makeshift doors, home to whole families coming in from the countryside with neither skills nor jobs. I was at outdoor markets where women with babies strapped to their backs and small children at their skirts lean over buckets of strong smelling oil, piles of fruit spoiling in the tropical sun, and open tins of dried fish; and they stay through the heat of the day to sell enough to support their large families, I went to an "apothecary," a dark, tent-like emporium, in which old wooden stands sag under mounds of stones and bones, pills and exotic concoctions, and charms and amulets to ward off illness, unhappiness, disappointment, and any other ill of the human condition.

And yet, there were others whose lives were quite different.

Ola's home is a lovely villa nestled in a hillside, with a panoramic view of both the city and the countryside. I was not

prepared for the architectural beauty of the interior, the ultramodern furnishings, and the collection of fine paintings, both European and African, hanging on the walls. This is a three-level house with all modern conveniences.

I could not help wondering whether the earnings of two professional people in Sierra Leone could support this lifestyle. No, it turns out that Ola and her husband also work in real estate, as builders, sellers, and renters. Obviously, they had put a lot of thought and effort into the design and construction of their own dwelling. It was spectacular by any standards.

The lunch was excellent too. Baked fish (barracuda?), fried rice, plantains, Mateus rose wine, and apple brown betty with custard sauce. Her older son, soon to leave for medical school in Nigeria, had started the cooking and Ola finished it when I arrived.

The loveliness of the surroundings and the delightful meal however could not dissuade her from her preoccupation with the health of women and children.

Malnutrition, she told me, is rampant among young children. Infant mortality, officially reported at about 50 per thousand, is grossly underestimated. Ola believes that in some areas it may be as much as ten times higher. Surviving childhood is a challenge in this country.

The problem in Sierra Leone is partly economic and partly cultural.

Babies and young children are fed largely on rice and cassava. As the child grows, this diet is grossly deficient in proteins, vitamins, and minerals, resulting in a large popula-

tion of weak, sickly children. Ola prescribes fish, eggs, fruits and vegetables, and when mothers try these, they bring back much healthier children. But most women believe that fish give children worms, eggs make them look like chickens, and fruits and vegetables make them sick. Even if a mother is willing to try something new, the grandmother who is very influential often vetoes the idea. Mothers are certainly eager for their children to thrive, but many want the doctor simply to give injections and pills to improve their child's energy, appetite, and health, Ola refuses these requests, while she steadily fights the cultural battle against malnutrition. Poorly nourished young children also fall prey to pneumonia and gastro-intestinal diseases.

Venereal disease is common among students. More and more young people are coming from the countryside into urban areas, live at schools, and become sexually active. Teen-age pregnancy is a growing urban problem. She gives talks regularly to Freetown to junior and senior high school girls about sexual relationships, abstinence, and contraception. Many of the girls, coming from rural areas where early marriages and relative sexual freedom are acceptable, have difficulty understanding the differing requirements of urban life. They giggle through the lectures and are perplexed nevertheless.

Family planning is another uphill battle. Even where clinics and services are available, many women will not go, and end up with frequent births accompanied by severe health problems for themselves and their children.

Ola is out on the front lines every day. Where does it end?

Before I leave, I give Ola a large, hand-decorated scarf from Israel. She folds it African style and winds it around her head. I look at her and see a tall, regal woman, somewhat reminiscent of the great national figure, Mammy Yoko.

We say good-by.

Tomorrow

Tomorrow I fly to Senegal and then back to the United States. "Manana" has caught up with me.

After Thoughts

Since 1984, I had kept up as well as I could with the scanty news we get in the United States about Sierra Leone. And then in the late 1990s, screaming headlines and ghastly pictures brought this small, ignored country into American homes. A brutal civil war took thousands of lives, caused millions of dollars of damages and created havoc that only years of dedicated effort can possibly overcome.

The needs however go far beyond the devastation of the recent war. The world of Ola, Alita and Palio, the fortunes of villages like Kai, the poverty typical of Freetown and other urban areas, and the medical, nutritional, and educational conditions, long-overlooked by an indifferent world, still await the enlightened self-interest and altruistic caring of the rest of us. Then perhaps, an urgently needed tomorrow will dawn on the Lion Mountain.

Note:

According to a 2013 report from the BBC, "Sierra Leone has experienced substantial economic growth in recent years, although the ruinous effects of the civil war continue to be felt . . . Economic recovery has been slow partly because the reconstruction needs are so great. Around half of government revenue comes from donors."

6. Memories of Pakistan 1984

Breakfast at the Karachi Airport

My first view of Pakistan was the airport at Karachi, the country's largest city. I landed there at 7 o'clock in the morning after a lengthy trip from Egypt, no sleep and no idea whether anyone was to meet me. When I cleared customs and entered the terminal, I could find no one who seemed to be looking for me. I had no plans except reservations on an afternoon flight to Islamabad, the country's capital.

Feeling a little lost, I decided breakfast might be a good idea. I knew no Urdu, the Pakistani language, and no idea what a Pakistani breakfast would be like. However, in the airport restaurant, I began to understand the impact of the British colonizers on this part of the world. The menu was the first indication – half English, half Urdu. The waiters also – perfectly fluent in English. I came all the way to Asia to find a strong British presence.

Somewhat more comfortable, I glanced at the food offerings– eggs, sausage, pancakes, cereal. Perhaps the local fare was listed in Urdu. I was too hungry and tired to find out.

Ah, I saw something on the menu that seemed safe and familiar – two eggs any style. That's what I ordered – two soft boiled three minute eggs and a cup of coffee. Then I comfortably waited for the food to arrive. It took a while, but finally the waiter came and proudly placed in front of me a cup of tea and a plate of scrambled eggs, saying in his best English, "Enjoy your breakfast, Madame."

Perplexed, I did not know whether to discuss the matter with the waiter or just eat what was served. As a cultural anthropologist however, I felt obliged to approach this error in cross-cultural communication.

I said, as respectfully and politely as I could, "Thank you. But" pointing to the plate of eggs "this does not look to me like two soft boiled three minute eggs."

The waiter was astonished. He too pointed to the eggs and repeated after me, "But, Madam, two soft boiled three minute eggs."

What now? I wondered. I repeated my comment - and he repeated his. We did this two or three times. Clearly, that was not getting us anywhere. Either we saw things very differently or one of us was not telling the truth. As a last resort, I took a pencil and a blank page from a notebook I was carrying and decided to draw a picture. A pot? The waiter nodded. Water? Nod. Too eggs? Another nod. Heat underneath? Nod. Clock showing three minutes? Another nod and an expectant look. What was he waiting for now? With finality, I said, "That's all!"

The waiter was incredulous. "That's all?" he exclaimed in wonderment. Pointing at the plate of eggs, he announced, "Madame, two eggs boiled in the pot for three minutes – FIRST!" Confusion all around! What did he mean by "first"? That then they were scrambled? Yes!

Wow! I had broken the communication barrier. That was enough. I would now eat the scrambled eggs.

But the waiter would have no part of that. He whisked the plate away and in short order came back with two eggs still

in the shell that had been boiled for three minutes. Just what I had ordered!

However in this one-upmanship, the waiter came out ahead. The eggs were served on a cloth napkin on a flat plate with a knife and fork on the side. I did not say a word. After all, how much cross cultural communication can one solve in one morning? Oh, and I never did discuss the tea.

Madame Ahmed and Islamabad

Madame Ahmed, was Secretary of the Women's Division in President Muhammad Zia's cabinet, I had hosted her visit to Fort Bragg, NC, several months earlier, and in return she had invited me to Pakistan. At the time, I was a Visiting Civilian Professor for one year at the Fort Bragg School for International Studies. Among my other duties, I taught cross-cultural communication skills to army officers in the School's Foreign Area Officer Corps program and to non-commissioned soldiers in specially designed orientation programs. All were to be assigned to overseas duty at some time in the near future.

On her visit to Fort Bragg, Madame Ahmed was treated as befitted a cabinet minister of a foreign country, with generals and colonels greeting and ushering her around. And I introduced my (largely male) military students to an accomplished woman from an Asian country who in no way matched their stereotypic view of women in Islamic cultures. Being the first woman and only anthropologist to teach in the Fort Bragg program, I tried to broaden students' understanding of cultural variation and women's issues. Not always an easy task.

Prior arrangements for my visit to Pakistan via airmail from the United States and later from Egypt proved to be a frustrating and very time-consuming task. In 1984, email, Skype, and low-cost overseas telephone calls were still in the future. And so, specific details about this visit were not always clear. A matter of trust and a desire to fulfill the kind invitation from Madame Ahmed led me to arrive in Islamabad with less than adequate knowledge of what my visit would be like.

I was met at the Islamabad airport by a representative sent by Madame Ahmed to escort me to the hotel. After preliminary greetings, the woman, whose name I cannot remember, asked politely why I had not met with the women's delegation waiting for me at the Karachi airport earlier that day. I murmured something about arriving early, being in the restaurant, and sorry that I did not see them. Actually I had no idea what she was talking about.

My "American" Driver in Islamabad

Because I had been invited by a cabinet minister, the American Embassy knew of my visit and the next morning sent an official car and driver to take me to the Embassy. The limousine was a long black vehicle with two small American flags waving in the breeze on either side of the hood. The driver was Pakistani with a good command of English.

We chatted on the relatively short ride to the Embassy and he informed me that he would probably be my driver whenever I needed the Embassy car. I had not expected such service. Neither had I expected the story he told me as we rode along.

He reminded me of the horrible incident five years earlier when in November 1979 angry Pakistani students stormed the American Embassy and burned it to the ground. I had remembered that the immediate cause of this outrage was an unfounded rumor that the Americans had bombed an Islamic holy site in Mecca and the students were retaliating.

The driver contradicted me. "No," he said. "I was the immediate cause!" To my astonishment, he told me the following. "That morning I was driving an American visitor to the Embassy. As we turned into the street we are now on, I saw a group of 5 or 6 students a block away carrying protest signs. As soon as they spotted the American flags on the car, they began chanting angry slogans and raced toward us." "What happened then," I gasped. "Well," he continued, "I was afraid they might attack, so I quickly turned down the nearest side street and drove away as fast as I could.. I continued driving for a while so as not to confront the rioters again." "And?" I prompted. "By the time I finally approached the Embassy, the students, incensed at my escape, had rounded up a whole contingent of other rioters. They all converged on the Embassy and set it on fire." He added, "My part of the story never got into the news reports."

Just as I was about to say something, we arrived at the Embassy where the Chief of Protocol greeted me and rushed me into the building. I never got back to the driver's story.

At the American Embassy

I think the reason for my meeting at the Embassy was to insure that I understood that my visit was a courtesy call not

an official visit. Of course I knew that and assured them that I would honor that role.

Somehow I sensed that in any case I would not be alone in my comings and goings. It looked like the American Embassy or the Pakistani Women's Division would provide an escort depending on the activity. That turned out to be true. My time was carefully scheduled including my "free" time - booked with someone to accompany me even for souvenir shopping. So much for getting to know the "person in the street" or rummaging alone in native shops. A totally different kind of travel than I was accustomed to. While the whole experience was amazing, I saw the end of my four day visit as not unwelcome.

Going to Lahore

The next day, I was scheduled to go to Lahore, the second largest city in the country but first in history and artistic accomplishment. Little did I realize that the day would provide me with conflicting scenes of women in Pakistan.

I had to make a 6 am flight from Islamabad to Lahore and transportation to the airport was provided by Pakistan. On the way to the airport at 5 a.m., we drove through wooded areas on the outskirts of Islamabad. Sleepily, I looked out the window. To my surprise, I saw a few women on bicycles, draped completely in long black robes with face veils that had openings only for their eyes. What were they doing out pedaling alone at this ungodly hour? My driver-informant simply said, "Going to work probably." "Where?" I asked. "Don't know," came the answer. End of conversation.

The airport waiting room was filled with Pakistani men headed for Lahore. The two or three women waiting looked every bit the foreign tourist – like me. Suddenly, a new focus of attention. A tall stately woman in Moslem dress entered the waiting room alone. Over her long black and white flowing garment, she had a short black shawl covering her head, face, shoulders and top of her body. To complete her outfit, she wore high heeled stylish patent leather pumps. One could not help but admire her stately carriage and nonchalant look.. She walked to the back of the room that was fairly empty, reached under her garment and withdrew a small prayer rug. This she unrolled on the floor and removing her shoes, proceeded to kneel and pray. What poise and self-confidence!

When the plane finally arrived (late), I wondered if I could find her and be her seatmate. But she had already disappeared – probably into the first class section. I was left to ponder the varied roles of women in this country, so different from the stereotypes we are shown in the United States.

Changing Gender Roles

The last two days of my visit were filled with more insights into a changing society and conflicts over gender.

1. I attended a meeting of a progressive women's group. The members were all women working in various professions: medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, administrators, and so on. They were forthright, adamant, and impatient at the slow pace of change. "I have offered to debate the Koran with some of our religious fanatics," said one. "But they do not accept the challenge. What they preach about women is

not in the Koran!" Another woman stressed the importance of making women's influence felt in whatever elections are held. They were not so interested in asking about United States. Rather they wanted me to take back information about the many active Pakistani women who are trying to make things better for women and for the country.

2. One of my escorts, an American woman named Norma, had worked for USAID (Agency for International Development) for many years and felt from her experience that there is a the need for reliance on Islamic guidance to accompany changes in women's roles. Things are moving very slowly in rural areas, she told me. For women to work outside the home was still considered degrading in the countryside. Now women from India in the untouchable caste have come into Pakistan to work. They tend to be garbage collectors. I thought of the women alone pedaling on bicycles at 5 o'clock in the morning – and wondered.

On the other hand, Norma recounted an incident of a wealthy woman who periodically traveled alone to London. Her husband and son ran a successful business together in Pakistan. If a quarrel broke out between her husband and son, the woman would be called back from England to mediate, make peace in the family, and see that the business continued to prosper.

There are other women, Norma continued, who express great satisfaction in their role as guardian of the household, caretaker of husband and children, and protected by the wisdom and strength of a husband and male relatives. They are not clamoring for changes in their life style.

3. And what were men thinking? I had a couple of occasions to gain some insight into male views. I was invited to give a talk on the subject, Social Change and Sex Division of Labor, to a large group of mostly male government employees of the Pakistani Department of Labor. I tried to describe how world trends toward more and more urbanization and industrialization tend to be accompanied by greater participation of women in the working world.

The men listened quietly and politely. In the question and answer period, many wanted to know, as conditions change, how to maintain the control they now felt over the household, over women and over children. That seemed to be their greatest concern. Not that women should not work outside the home or should not earn money for the family. But that the home balance of power should not be disturbed. I could only say that every country, every culture, has to find its own way to accommodate to changes in the course of history. I urged them to find their own way to adapt. I had the feeling that was not what they wanted to hear.

However we all were invited to a pleasant reception following my talk. And in true British fashion, there were mounds of little cucumber sandwiches as refreshments.

My Farewell Dinner.

Madame Ahmed met with me only twice during my stay in Pakistan – once shortly after I arrived and then at the farewell dinner she arranged in my honor. She apologized for her very demanding schedule and was sorry she could not spend more time with me. I too was sorry, but I understood

and was very appreciative for her efforts to make my visit memorable – and it was

The farewell dinner was held at a lovely hotel in downtown Islamabad, in a beautiful private room, and with absolutely delicious food. Madame Ahmed knew how to arrange things well! It was attended mainly by people who worked with Madame Ahmed in the Women's Division of the Pakistani cabinet. And most of the attendees were men. Somehow I had not expected that. These were men who were as dedicated to advancing the rights and status of women as any feminist I had ever known.

What a surprise! Topics of conversation included freedom of choice in women's dress, men's intransigence regarding power in the home, using the Koran to help advance women's rights, etc., etc. I had never been with a group of men so committed to improve things for women. It was impressive! I thought many American (and other) men could certainly learn from this group of Pakistani men.

My farewell dinner was a great ending to a rare experience. Surprisingly I felt a little sad leaving these men, the women I had gotten to know, and the many contradictions I had discovered in an Asian Moslem country.

Looking back, I sense that I learned more in this four-day cross-cultural experience than in much of my academic study. And I am grateful for the knowledge I received from everyone I met in Pakistan, insights that began with the waiter in the Karachi airport restaurant.

7. Alone in the Heart of the Canadian Rockies

Summer 1996

I am still recovering from the loss of my husband, Henry. Before we met, Henry was a great traveler and saw most of the sights in the United States and Canada. But the one place he missed was Lake Louise in the Canadian Rockies. He promised to go there with me. I wanted to make up for it with this trip. And I wanted to do it alone. No companions sitting next to me. No distracting conversations. Just me and my own thoughts.

The tour of the Canadian Rockies starts in Seattle, Washington. When you start a bus tour in Seattle, one of the first things you are shown is the home of Bill Gates, CEO of Microsoft. We look across the bay, and there is the \$40 million sprawling property of the world's richest person. The house is still under construction – and may never be finished as it strives to keep pace with the latest technology. Visitors to the mansion are given a button when they arrive, and then they can hear their favorite music as they roam from room to room. Paintings are controlled by computer and keep changing on the walls. Somewhere there is a whole bunker of computers that control whatever you can imagine.

Bill Gates and Microsoft are not Seattle's only claim to fame. The city is the country's largest consumer of coffee, with coffee kiosks wherever you look. Also citizens of Seattle are the country's greatest consumers of sunglasses. The reason for this last fact is not clear. I saw no one wearing sunglasses as we hurriedly drove out of the city.

The bus carrying us toward Canada is a Prevost. The Prevost is made near Quebec by a division of Volvo. It is a leading manufacturer of luxury intercity travel and motor homes, so the tour guide tells us. The tour itself is conducted by Globus, a Swiss-Italian company headquartered in Switzerland and the oldest bus tour company in the world. We obviously are in good hands.

Road signs have local color. For example: "Work Zone – Give 'em a brake" and "Slow vehicle turn-out – Illegal to hold up 5-car line up." I am still figuring out what the last sign means.

We reach the town of Startup, Washington. Like the name implies, it is the town before starting up the Cascades Mountains. Startup is a small town that used to have two churches. Now one of them is an art center and the other a bicycle shop with two bikes in the belfry. We do not go up to see the bikes. The town has no churches now, but nearby are recently established llama and ostrich farms. Llamas are bred for fur and skin; ostriches for meat, feathers and skin.

The Cascade Mountains are impressive, even though we do not see the peaks of Mt. Rainier or Mt. St. Helens. In the Cascades, we are told, you can choose your weather. The west side is usually sunny, bright, and warm with a cheerful blue sky. But go over to the east, and it is gray, cloudy, gloomy, and chilly. No contest there. We do not drive up into the Cascades. Instead we are treated to a video about tree and forest management provided by the Weyerhaeuser Lumber Company stressing their concern for reforestation and the environment.

We are still in the state of Washington, and we stop for brunch in Leavenworth, a village with a Bavarian theme. In the 1930's, Leavenworth like the rest of the country fell on hard times. To attract tourists, Leavenworth became the first "theme" town in the country – and the tourists came.

Leavenworth continues to offer good food (especially the macaroon pastry), warm clothing for travelers who do not realize how cold it gets in the mountains, and souvenir items like the small placard saying "Lisa's Kitchen." I buy that one for my daughter, Lisa.

Driving out of Leavenworth toward Wanachee, we find sparkling mountain streams and finally Washington's main apple growing center. Apparently there is much to know about apples , and we learn by watching a really good video.

In the Spring, when the myriad of blossoms are out, bee keepers bring in one billion bees to pollinate the blooms. After harvesting, apples are kept in storage in California. In a controlled atmosphere the apples are "put to sleep." With reduced oxygen, they stop "breathing" to arrest any more ripening. Apples can thus be stored for a year, and when taken out are as fresh and good as when put into storage. Apples are therefore available any time of the year. On average, five billion apples are harvested per season. Half are consumed in the United States and the rest shipped and sold all over the world.

We drive through lush valleys growing apples and other fruits, surrounded by tall, dry desert-like mountains with scrub and sage, sparse vegetation and few trees. And we enter Canada.

Here in British Columbia, the mountains already look higher. We are in the Osoipos Valley, the “fruit basket” of British Columbia. Along the way, we pass a resting herd of buffalo at a wild life sanctuary. Then we are at Okanagan Lake – very large – 800 feet deep at the deepest point and 78 miles long. Since the 1800’s, a lake monster, Ogo Pogo, is believed to live in the lake. Claims of Indians’ sighting of the monster date back to the 19th century. The name, Ogo Pogo, seems to come from a 19th century London song.

On the way to Kelowna and before our first get-acquainted dinner, we find a lumber mill with the largest pile of saw dust any of us has ever seen. We are reminded to look at the sky. Amazing cloud formations in all colors – white, gray, black, and pastels – some teetering on the crest of the mountains, others above or below the crest. Too bad we do not stop for photos.

Suddenly everything quiets down on the bus. The audio speaker plays soft ethereal music. We look out the window - and gasp! There in majestic, regal, spiritual splendor is the glory of the overpowering Canadian Rockies. I have seen the Appalachians, the Alps, the Apennines, the Berkshires, the American Rockies – but never anything that took my breath away as my first sight of the Canadian Rockies. A wonder!

Before we reach Kelowna, we are surprised to see newly burgeoning residential communities complete with shopping centers, specialty shops, parks, and so forth. Residents move here from other parts of Canada and from Asian countries. The property for these communities is leased from the local American Indian population.

We arrive at the Coast Capri Hotel in Kelowna at 5:15 pm. The hotel is small with good food and atmosphere and an interesting gift shop. I buy two pairs of earrings enameled and hand-painted on gold plated discs. The jewelry they tell me is hand-made by a 75-year old woman living on an island in a nearby lake. I don't know what else to ask.

Leaving Kelowna the next morning, we pass ginseng farms. The crop is grown for roots, teas, and various health cures. Ginseng is normally grown in the tropics, but in this colder northern climate, black netting covers the plants to mimic tree cover in humid forests and to keep dampness close to the plants.

On the way to Banff, we stop for a picnic lunch. There things change for me and for my plans to keep to myself on the bus tour.

A 50-ish couple on the tour, Edna and Bill, see me sitting alone at a picnic table and come over to sit with me. We chat idly about ourselves and where we live. At the end of our conversation, the similarities we discover make us friends for the rest of the tour.

The three of us had started life in New York City, gone to many of the same schools, lived in various parts of the United States. And then the question comes up – why on this tour? They are celebrating their anniversary, and I – I am making this trip with Henry in mind. They promise to respect my aloneness but to be there if I need company.

I even tell Edna and Bill why I am wearing one glove all the time. My fingers sometimes hurt badly from arthritis and the one thing that helps is to wear a glove on the offending

fingers. Later Edna and Bill are kind to explain my situation to the rest of the travelers who have regarded me as rather odd with the one glove and not talking to anyone. So instead of questioning my isolation, everyone acts warm and friendly, and they let me be when I want to be alone.

Banff, Vancouver, Victoria all live up to their reputations as well-traveled tourist attractions. Good hotels, fine food, great views and excellent sightseeing opportunities.

But Lake Louise is something else. No wonder Henry wanted us to go there. Across a jewel of a lake is a shining white glacier flanked on both sides by arcs of mountains rising beside the lake and hugging the glacier with protecting arms. And all of it reflected in the blue-white surface of Lake Louise. Even the intrusion of the nearby chateau could not detract from the perfection.

Edna comes by as I am absorbing the moment. I had asked one of the men on the tour to take my picture with Lake Louise and the glacier in the background. "Of course! We just have to wait until Edna moves out of camera range," he tells me. I decide to ask Edna to move out of the way and say, "Edna, please, if you don't mind. I want to have a photo of myself with the lake and glacier in the background." An immediate misunderstanding. "Certainly. I'll be glad to," Edna exclaims. She promptly walks over and puts her arm around my shoulder. The man with the camera snaps the picture!

Later I ask the same man to take another picture. In my mind's eye, I see Henry next to me with his arm about my waist. Only this time I am in the picture with Lake Louise – alone.

8. Not Always Alone

Not all travel needs to be done alone. There is something to be said for having a companion along - which I have done on many occasions. Many incidents that I treasure would not have occurred had I been by myself. Here are a few of them.

Guadeloupe and the Beach

I was at a Club Med resort on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. It catered to adults of all ages, interests, backgrounds, and cultures. But largely there were two main groups – the younger set, busy with surfing, rock music, weird hairdos, and so forth. And the older set, beachcombers, bridge players, swimmers, hikers, and socializers. I more or less fit into the latter group and found similar companions at meals, as we sat at shared tables. This arrangement made my vacation very pleasant.

One morning, my newfound friend, Janey, and I sat at a breakfast table with some people from Illinois. Among the group was a Chicago dentist who was also an engaging raconteur. Delighted with his stories, we asked when we could listen to more. And that's how we arranged to meet on the beach that afternoon.

The resort catered to a very large clientele, and without advance planning, one could rarely run into someone by chance. We did not realize that even locating someone on the beach could be a challenge. We also learned that there were designated beach sections - one just for women, one for men, and the rest for everyone.

Later Janey and I had the same question - where to find the dentist? And in a bathing suit yet – will we recognize him without his multicolored Hawaiian shirt?

Never mind the shirt. We discovered that the segregated beaches – one for women and one for men – were for nude bathing. Another challenge. The other was for everyone and required a bathing suit.

Needless to say we never did find the dentist. Janey and I did our best to look for him on all the beaches. But people look different in different outfits - or wearing nothing at all.

A Visit to Italy

Leon and I were traveling together in Italy. Strange how fate works. We had known each other for a short time as teenagers and then gone on to live separate lives – marriage, children, work, and growing older. When our paths crossed again, we were both in our fifties, our children were grown and our marriages were falling apart. Work had taken me to Europe for a few years and Leon was earning loads of money which kept him close to his job in New York. On what felt like a youthful impulse, I invited him to visit me in Europe. And so our trip to Italy.

Leon left the itinerary up to me since I had already been in Germany for many months. Germany would have been easier, but he preferred Italy. Fortunately one of my American academic colleagues had just returned to Germany from an Italian vacation with his male partner and had suggestions about somewhat unusual places to stay.

So in Rome, Leon and I went to a convent run by Dominican Sisters from Germany. Part of the convent was used as a small motel that the Sisters ran as a money making venture. They catered only to people through personal recommendation. My colleague's name and our somewhat limited ability to speak German were enough to grant us entrance.

The Mother Superior took down the necessary information, and in the process asked with a sidelong glance if we were married. From long habit, we automatically answered "yes." Then suddenly we realized she meant to each other! Too late. She was already giving us the room key and instructions about breakfast and lunch.

Emboldened by our progress, Leon pressed his luck. He told the Mother Superior that he meditated for 15 minutes every morning, and was there a quiet room where he could continue this activity while we were there. From the look on her face, nothing could have pleased the Mother more. Of course, she said. The Sisters met for prayer in the chapel every morning before breakfast and there was lots of room for Leon.

And so each morning as the Dominican Sisters from Germany gathered for morning prayers, Leon, a nice Jewish boy from New York, sat at the back of a Catholic chapel in Italy with his eyes closed quietly intoning a Hindu mantra from India. A scene of cross-cultural intermingling of several religions with perfect acceptance and respect for one and all. I was delighted!

Why Are You Here?

It was 1984 and I was riding in a hired car from Heliopolis, a Cairo suburb, to downtown Cairo, Egypt's capital city. Samina, a 22 year old Egyptian young woman, accompanied me. She was the daughter in the family I was staying with and the one designated to accompany me on my exploits around the capital. Samina was the one family member who was fluent in English, had graduated from the American University in Cairo, and was eager to be of help to a visiting academic researcher. Also the family refused to let me travel alone. Not suitable for a visitor, they said, - especially not for a woman.

Much as I had protested, once I saw what traffic was like I appreciated their concern. The congestion on the road was startling. Not only cars and trucks. Also donkeys, bicycles, horses and wagons, motor cycles, and an occasional push-cart - all mixed in together on the main highway to Cairo. Each went at a different speed and required a lot of vigilance on the part of drivers. Beyond that, obeying traffic lights seemed optional. As for traffic circles - sometimes traffic flowed in both directions! Samina seemed unconcerned. She was accustomed to this, and I tried hard to take my cue from her.

In downtown Cairo, we walked everywhere we needed to go. The streets were jammed and crossing the street was a herculean task. Traffic lights were rarely where you needed them, and anyway they were a sometime thing to many drivers. The native population was amazingly skilled at communicating through eye contact. The pedestrian and the automobile driver exchanged glances and in that split-second agreed on who had the right of way. Either the car

went first or the pedestrian. In my several visits to downtown Cairo, I saw no errors in judgment. This seemed perfectly natural to the local people, but nerve wracking to strangers like me. If not for Samina, I would still be standing at the curb waiting to cross the street!

On the way back to Heliopolis, Samina ventured some personal conversation. It went something like this:

Samina: Do you have any children?

Me: Yes. I have a daughter and two sons.

S: How old are they?

Me: All in their twenties.

S: Are they married?

Me: No. Not yet.

S: So why are you here?

To my startled reaction, she hastened to explain. Didn't I think it's a mother's place to stay home and arrange marriages for her unmarried (and very eligible) children?

I said it was not the American custom and my children would likely resent the interference.

Her turn to be astonished. Incredulous, she simply said, "Why?"

I did not have a ready answer, so she continued.

In a tone of giving instructions to the uninformed, she told me that young people in their teens or twenties are too young to know who is a really suitable marriage partner. They need parental guidance and help in finding a mate. "After all," she said, "my parents have known me all my life. They would judge better than I who would be a good

husband for me. Of course," she continued, "they would not require me to marry someone I did not like. But I need their judgment and wisdom."

She added, "Doesn't that make sense to you?"

I had to admit that it did. Then she repeated her question, "So why are you here?" And I still didn't have a good answer.

Then knowing she was engaged to be married, I asked if that was how her marriage partner had been selected. Somewhat ill at ease, she admitted that is not exactly how it happened. "You see," she explained to me, "my parents follow the practice of betrothing their children to cousins – children of their father's brother. And so as a very young child, I was engaged to my first cousin on my father's side."

"How is that working out?" I asked.

"Well, his family moved to the United State and he is now living on Staten Island."

"And are you going to America to be married?"

"Not really. I hardly know him anymore. I don't want to leave my family. And anyway I am going to break the engagement."

An unexpected ending to her story.

Then I asked if she wanted her parents to look for another marriage partner for her now. Her answer was also unexpected. "I am not sure," was all she said.

Confused, we both rode along in silence. And the car sped back to Heliopolis and to dinner with the family.

Haitian Encounters

Haiti is a country of strange contrasts. Among the poorest countries in the world, it nevertheless is home to the warmest, most caring people I have ever met in all my travels. However, I did not know that when in 1978 I arranged for a winter vacation on this Caribbean Island.

Arriving in the capital, Port-au-Prince, I was immediately annoyed by the fact that my luggage was missing, that my limited French was no match for the Haitian Creole that people were speaking all around me, and that outside the airport the hot muggy air was filled with pungent odors of nearby slums. Not an auspicious beginning.

Things got better the next day when my suitcase filled with summer clothes arrived, I had a nice room in a comfortable hotel, and enjoyed breakfast in a breeze filled outdoor dining room.

On to exploring Port-au-Prince. I asked at the front desk of this highly recommended hotel (that catered to "Europeans" - a term which included Americans, Chinese, and other foreigners) about my walking into town by myself. Most hotel guests rented cars or went in taxis wherever they wanted to go. But I was interested in the city itself.

I was surprised at the hotel clerk's answer. "Madame," he said. "A woman can feel perfectly safe walking alone in Port-au-Prince at any time of the day or night." What a surprise for someone coming from New York! And so I proceeded to walk the two miles into town.

All went well until I was approached by a street vendor with an armful of roughly hewn wood carvings he was selling for

fifty cents apiece. I tried to tell him I was not interested, but he continued to chatter and walk along with me. Finally I decided that I would spend one dollar, buy two items that I did not need, and go on my way.

As I paid the overjoyed salesman, I was suddenly surrounded by six other sellers. I had no idea where they came from. Later I learned that, unless you definitely want to buy something, do not make eye contact or take out American money. But now I was faced with a circle of men all wanting my attention to buy their products.

I was about to give up and go back to the hotel, when a 12 year old boy named Rene came out of nowhere and very politely asked in French that I could understand - did I want his help. It was a gift I had not expected. When I said yes, he ordered the group away, saying he was in charge now. That worked. And I got to spend a delightful afternoon with Rene as he guided me to interesting shops, pointed out national landmarks, and finally, arranging the fare for me in advance, commandeered a taxi to take me directly back to the hotel. Rene, though only 12, was my first encounter with the kindness and caring I found typical in Haiti.

Of course, I did see, patrolling on a few city streets, fierce-looking, hated members of the strong-arm squad, the Touton Macoute, One avoided them as much as possible. The dictatorship of "Baby Doc" seemed somehow to exist outside the lives of the generally impoverished people.

A few days later, I had an unexpected and frightening experience. I was on one of the busiest downtown streets where, as usual, the sidewalk was cracked and broken and the street full of potholes. One had to be very careful where

one stepped. I was looking at the condition of the curb as I began stepping down to cross the street. Suddenly a warm strong hand grasped mine and forcefully pulled me back. Agghast, I turned to see a white haired elderly man clenching my hand, as a speeding car dashed past us close to the curb. I was shocked. He had saved my life!

Without saying a word, he held on to me and guided me across. Then he held up his index finger in a gesture of warning and shook his head – no. And before I could figure out how to thank him, he was gone.

Finally before I left Haiti, I chose to attend an evening performance of a Vodou ritual designed for visitors and foreigners and anyone else interested. It was not billed as authentic, but more like a sample of the real thing. That was about as good as I could do. The performance was interesting once I got there, but the taxi ride to the arena proved a surprise.

Talk about caring and concerned people, my taxi driver was among the best. He noticed right away that I was on vacation alone and that I apparently had some interest in Vodou. Putting two and two together, he asked me if I had a husband or a “special friend” back home. No, I said, neither. Then apparently I needed some help with my love life, yes? Avoiding a direct answer, I murmured, “Why do you ask?”

“Oh,” he said, “You are such a nice lady, you need a good man in your life. And I know someone who could help you.”

“Oh,” I said.

“Yes, I have his card with me and if you mention my name, he will go out of his way for you.”

I had nothing to add.

Not at all discouraged, my taxi driver plowed on.

"Let me tell you about another American lady I drove to this Vodou performance a few months ago."

And here was the story he told me.

Maria (not her real name) lived in Washington, D.C. and was dating a wealthy, important person in the U.S. government. She very much wanted this relationship to succeed and to lead to marriage. But the man seemed non-committal and she had no idea how to move the relationship along. Then came the taxi driver to the rescue. Upon the driver's recommendation, she visited the Vodou practitioner who assured her he could solve her problem. The price was \$ 3,000: \$ 1,500 now and \$ 1,500 from the United States after she was married.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Well," the taxi driver said, "they were married within a few of months."

"Did she send the rest of the money?" I wondered. "Now that she was married, perhaps she did not have to?"

The taxi driver was incredulous. "What?" he exclaimed. "And risk the marriage falling apart? No! No! Of course, she sent the money!"

By this time, we had reached the arena for the performance. As I paid for the ride, I noticed that along with my change, the driver slipped the Vodou practitioner's card into my hand. And with a knowing smile, he bade me "Adieu."

Max in Czechoslovakia

In the early 1970's, I was living in Germany temporarily, teaching at a branch of an American university. Echoes of the Holocaust were ever present in my mind, and though I tried, it was hard to get a German person to talk about the Nazi era. But there was Hulda, a fifty year old East German woman who recounted to me a haunting experience. As a young girl, she wanted to give her seat on a bus to a sickly, pale, thin, frightened old man. But she didn't dare because she saw the yellow star on his threadbare coat. For her to give her seat to a Jew would mean immediate arrest for them both. After almost thirty years, she still had nightmares about the cruelty to which she was a part. Then there was Hugo, a colonel in the German army who had served during the Hitler regime. He protested that he was not a Nazi – as a matter of fact he did not approve of Hitler. So what was he doing in the army? He said it was his career and he had no choice. And what did he not approve of? Oh, he said, Hitler was incompetent. After all, he was losing the war!

But Max was different. He told me about his childhood when Hitler came to power. He was in the Hitler Jugend and enjoyed the uniforms, the marching, the camping. Somewhat like the Boy Scouts? By the time Max was sixteen, the Americans were bombing Berlin. He was then a staunch German patriot shooting antiaircraft weapons at the American planes.

It was only after the war that as an adult, he grasped the full horror of the Holocaust. Totally shaken, he flirted with various left wing organizations and finally went to a German university, got a degree, and landed a position with the American university where I was teaching. His English,

though heavily accented, was fluent, and he valued and protected his job with the Americans at all costs. Max was in charge of arranging cultural events for our students and faculty in Germany and in neighboring countries.

That was how I got to travel with him and 20 of our students to Prague, Czechoslovakia. Max was the organizer and tour guide of this four day escapade, and I was the faculty representative on the trip. Included in the itinerary was a visit to the Alt-Neu Synagogue in downtown Prague. This venerable old building had been commandeered by the Nazis, stripped of its traditional prayer meeting items and used as a museum for artifacts stolen from synagogues throughout the country. Now the museum part was being dismantled and the synagogue returned to its former status. Services were held every Friday evening and a small building nearby was used for Hebrew classes and a synagogue office.

While our tour group milled around the sanctuary, I went to this neighboring building to talk to those involved in the restoration. Only Bernard was there, a small, sad looking man who was the accountant and local historian. We chatted a while and he seemed glad to find an American interested in the past and present history of Jews in his country. He told me of the horrors during the war, the starvation after the war, and the recent invasion of the country by the Russians. His twenty-one year old son had escaped to London because of political activity against the Russians. Bernard and his wife might never see him again. Told in a matter of fact voice, it was still a sad, sad story.

Then Bernard asked, very hesitatingly, would I do him a favor. Since the end of the war, many visitors had come by to see

this famous synagogue. Most left some monetary offering – a tip perhaps, or to buy something for the restored building. Much of the money was in Deutsche Marks - which were not useful in Czechoslovakia. However, if he could exchange the German Marks for American dollars that would be great. I asked how much he had, and he replied about \$ 100 worth (the exchange rate was then about 3 Marks to the dollar). Not knowing how to respond to this request, I offered to see what I could do and let him know. He suggested we meet again the next day.

And so I consulted Max that evening. I explained to him that I did not have that much American money with me, and anyway I did not know if this was something we should do. Max looked grim. I couldn't tell what he was thinking. Was this legal, I asked. He shrugged. What should we do? Another shrug. He simply said, "I will go with you tomorrow." Grateful for that, I ended the conversation.

The next day, Max and I set out for the synagogue. He was very quiet. I hoped he would take charge of the conversation and spare me the discomfort. I knew Max had to conform to the legal and other demands of the situation. And he had the safety of his job to consider.

As we walked into the building, I could already imagine the disappointment on Bernard's face. When we entered the room, Bernard was already there, pale and sad and clutching three bags full of Deutsche Marks. Max continued to look grim.

Then Max took some bills from his pocket, counted out \$100 in American money, and handed it to Bernard. An ecstatic Bernard could only repeat "Danke! Danke! Danke!"

Handing over the three bags of coins, he waited for Max to count the Marks. Instead, Max reached for a shopping bag that was lying around, stuffed the three bags into it, and stood up. Taking the shopping bag with us and murmuring 'wiedersehn', we all shook hands. And Max and I were outside again headed for our hotel.

I was somewhat overwhelmed. I finally turned to Max and said, "That was a wonderful thing you did."

"No," he corrected me. "That was not wonderful. *It was the only thing to do.*"

9. Epilogue

As I had told Charlie on my way to the Florida Keys, my hobby at that time was traveling. But time takes its toll and things have changed. Now my hobby is writing about my former trips – and reliving them as I write. Given the current discomforts of air travel, the ever increasing costs, the recurrent alerts about dangers in foreign countries, and my chronically sore leg and special dietary considerations, it is just as well to stay at home.

Will I write more? Perhaps. There were other travels and much to observe along the way. Sometimes I traveled alone, sometimes with others. But always there were unique people and unexpected experiences.

Stay tuned!